

JOURNAL
of
EARLY SOUTHERN
DECORATIVE ARTS

~~PROPERTY
OF
THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA~~

May, 1990
Volume XVI, Number 1
The Museum of Early Southern
Decorative Arts

MESDA ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Benefactor	*
Patron	\$500 and up
Sustaining	\$100 to \$499
Corporate or Foundation	\$150 and up
Supporting	\$ 35 to \$ 99
Family.	\$ 25
Individual	\$ 20***

*Persons who contribute valuable antiquities are considered Benefactors of MESDA. Once named a Benefactor, a person remains such for life and enjoys all the privileges of a Member of MESDA.

** A contribution of \$100.00 or more entitles the member to bring guests to the museum free of charge.

***Non-profit Institutions may subscribe to the *Journal* only, receiving two issues per annum at the rate of \$15.00.

Overseas members please add \$10.00 for airmail postage.

PRIVILEGES

Members of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts receive the *Journal* twice yearly in May and November, as well as the MESDA newsletter, the *Luminary*, which is published in February and August. Other privileges include notification of the classes and programs and lectures offered by the Museum, an Annual Member's Weekend with reports from the MESDA Research staff, a 10% discount on bookstore purchases, and free admission to the Museum.

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts is owned and operated by Old Salem, Inc., the non-profit corporation that is responsible for the restoration and operation of Old Salem, Moravian Congregation Town founded in 1766. MESDA is an educational institution with the established purpose of collecting, preserving, documenting and researching representative examples of southern decorative arts and craftsmanship from the 1600s to 1820. The Museum exhibits its collection for public interest and study.

For further information, please write to MESDA, Box 10310, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27108. Telephone (919) 721-7360.

JOURNAL
of
EARLY SOUTHERN
DECORATIVE ARTS

May, 1990
Volume XVI, Number 1
Published twice yearly in
May and November by
The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

LIBRARY
THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

621.412-1990
5198

Copyright © 1990 Old Salem, Inc.
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27108

Printed by Hall Printing Company
High Point, North Carolina

Contents

<i>John Blake White: An Introduction</i>	1
------------------------------------------	---

MARY ELLEN TURNER

<i>Coffin Making and Undertaking in Charleston and its Environs, 1705-1820</i>	18
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

BRADFORD L. RAUSCHENBERG



Figure 1. Battle of Fort Moultrie, oil on canvas, John Blake White (1781-1859), Charleston, 1815. 32'' x 50''. U. S. Senate Collection, courtesy Senate Curator's Office.

John Blake White: An Introduction

MARY ELLEN TURNER

John Blake White was born in 1781 near Eutaw Springs, or Eutawville, South Carolina.¹ Blake Leay White, John's father, owned land that was part of White Hall plantation in St. John's Parish, Berkeley County, until 1790, and it is possible that White was born there. White's family was a distinguished one. His Blake relatives were Irish. His grandfather, Sir John White, came to America from England with William Penn, surrendered his title, became a Quaker, and took an active part in colonial government.²

Little is known of Blake's early life. He studied law in Columbia, South Carolina, and in 1800 sailed for England where he learned to paint under the tutelage of Benjamin West.³ Other painters with Charleston backgrounds attended West's Royal Academy of Art at about the same time, including Samuel F. B. Morse, Washington Allston, and Edward Greene Malbone. White kept a journal during and after his years abroad, diligently reporting his travels, the friends who visited him from the states, the plays he attended, the artists he met, and the paintings he saw. Apparently he never passed up an opportunity to view what he believed were the choicest works by the ablest masters. He considered two of the finest collections in London to be those of Jonathan Hope and John Julius Angerstein, who owned Michelangelo's *Resurrection of Lazarus*. He also cherished the visits from his old friends, writing on one occasion, "When at a distance surrounded by strangers, our affections take far stronger hold upon us than when in our native land and surrounded by those whom we have loved and known since infancy."⁴

Unfortunately, White rarely wrote of his own painting lessons. However, his casual notes on the men and events of his time have become quite valuable to historians, for his comments were candid and shed light on the attitudes of many of his well-known contemporaries, of whom Colonel John Trumbull was one. White had an opportunity to visit Trumbull before embarking on his studies with West and enthusiastically informed him of his wish to paint — “the profession from which I anticipated so much glory and happiness in pursuing.” The colonel, however, advised him to continue with his law studies. “Relinquish painting,” he said. “It will never repay you for your pains, because it depends upon the caprice and whim of mankind. Law is certain; painting is unnecessary.” White apparently was not affected by Trumbull’s words at that time. “All this only made me smile,” he wrote.⁵

That White had a sense of humor is also evident in his writings. For example, upon his arrival in England, he and a friend found that their hairstyles were quite out of fashion. They went to the nearest barber shop where, White wrote, they received their “first lesson of London extortion.” Their curious barber lavished much time and all his skill on their hair, and when he finished, they noted that he had also taken care to charge for the time he had lost — the bill was three times what it should have been.⁶

In 1803, after three years in Europe, White returned to Charleston to paint portraits, the only type of painting that received sufficient encouragement in South Carolina at that time. His portrait of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, executed in 1804, even prompted a proposal for the publication of an engraving from White’s likeness.⁷ However, he found no enthusiasm for historical painting, the genre espoused by West and with which White was most taken. Feeling that he could find success in the North, White journeyed to Boston. He carried many letters with him, one of which was from a young lady to her cousin, Miss Eliza Allston, who had been living in Newport, Rhode Island, and travelling for health reasons. At that time he also met with Mr. Timothy Ford, a South Carolinian living near Boston and practicing law, and related how disappointed he was not to have met with more success as a painter. Several days later, Ford and Trumbull, who had returned from London, called on White, telling him that if he could not bear to give up painting, he should leave America and paint in Spain or Florence.

White did not heed this advice. Instead he decided to return to Charleston and set sail for Carolina. Aboard the ship were Miss

Allston and her friends. Of this circumstance he wrote, "It was during this voyage that I was happy enough to engage the affection of Miss Allston; and before my arrival, I made known my attachment to her." She returned to her home near Georgetown, and they were married in March 1805. White thought it expedient to accustom his wife to the Charleston climate, so for two years they lived in Hampstead, then Gadsden's Green, before moving to the city. At that time he had abandoned his painting and returned to practicing law, a profession in which he also struggled.⁸ In 1806, in an attempt to bolster a faltering income, White wrote a tragedy, "Foscari," which was presented at the Charleston theater.⁹ He received half the net profits from three presentations, amounting to \$86.25. "I was never more in need of it in my life," he wrote. He was advised to publish the play and eventually received \$700 for the work. Another play earned him about \$400, and in 1808 he was admitted to the bar, three years after he had applied. His financial situation markedly improved, he and Eliza moved from their house on Liberty Street to 85 Broad. They had four children between 1806 and 1812: Edward Brickell, Adeline Elizabeth, Lorenzo Allston, and Alonzo James.

In 1812 White wrote another tragedy, "Modern Honor," which was well-received on its opening night. However, by its third presentation, the audience was indifferent, and the profits did not clear the house. White blamed public calamities such as the destruction of the theater at Richmond and the shock of the Charleston earthquakes for the play's decline in popularity.¹⁰ It was during this time that he probably painted his four best-known paintings, *General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal*, *Sergeant's Jasper and Newton Rescuing American Prisoners from the British*, *Mrs. Motte Directing Generals Marion and Lee to Burn Her Mansion to Dislodge the British*, and *Battle of Fort Moultrie*. These works, all done between 1810 and 1815, now hang in the United States Capitol and were donated by his son, Dr. Octavius White. White also continued his law practice and painted portraits of such South Carolina luminaries as John C. Calhoun, Keating Simons, and Governor Henry Middleton. In 1817 his wife Eliza died after a three-month illness and was buried in the family plot at St. Philip's.¹¹ White wrote: "When this happened, the agony of my mind was inexpressible. I looked around but saw no source of consolation. My children gave me no comfort; they only heightened my despair. Religion was no

resource. I had not sufficiently cultivated it to experience the benefit.”¹² A year later he was elected to the South Carolina General Assembly.¹³ In 1819 he married Anna Rachel O’Driscoll. They had four children: Francis O’Driscoll, John Blake, Octavius Augustus, and another son who died as an infant.¹⁴

In 1821 Samuel F. B. Morse and John Steven Cogdell helped establish the South Carolina Academy of Fine Arts and appointed White as one of the directors. Although many South Carolinians and Charlestonians in particular expressed an interest in patronage of the arts, the academy was not a success. Most wealthy Charlestonians were dependent upon a rice and cotton based economy that did not allow for a consistent circulation of money. In the agrarian crisis that gripped Charleston in the 1820s, capital and patrons began to disappear simultaneously. Although its early exhibitions, particularly the 1823 show, included works of many prominent artists and old masters, interest in the Academy waned quickly, and it expired in 1830, a victim of public apathy and economic deprivation.¹⁵

Samuel F. B. Morse’s experiences with the wealthy dowager, Mrs. Caroline Ball, serve to illustrate the problems Charleston’s portraitists had with patrons from the planter class. Mrs. Ball commissioned her portrait in 1819, agreeing to a \$600 fee. The painting was completed in the summer of 1820 after Morse effected a number of alterations at Mrs. Ball’s request. The portrait was exhibited in Morse’s studio, where it received the enthusiastic approbation of many Charleston residents, as well as the praises of John Trumbull. When Mrs. Ball came to retrieve her painting, her first reaction was favorable, but a second look brought a host of complaints: the painting was too large, she wanted a purple curtain, a guitar on a table in the picture was the wrong shape and color, she wanted it altered and a gold necklace added around the neck. Morse complied, but admitted that he thought she was deranged. In actuality, Mrs. Ball, rather than suffering from aesthetic paranoia, was unable to pay Morse his \$600 and used her complaints as delaying tactics. Threats and insults ensued for three months until she finally admitted that she lacked the funds to settle her account. She could only spare \$400, and if the harvest improved, she might be able to add to the payment. Morse was incredulous and sarcastically demanded to know if the goodness or badness of her crop was the scale on which her conscience measured her obligation to pay a debt.¹⁶

Histories of White’s other distinguished colleagues, as well

as his own, also indicate the vagaries of trying to earn livings as artists in Charleston during the first decades of the nineteenth century. To augment insufficient incomes, Charles Fraser wrote poetry, Washington Allston wrote essays, and White wrote plays. Allston and Morse eventually left Charleston to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Although Fraser, Cogdell, and White remained in Charleston, only Fraser, after twelve years of practicing law, was ever able to paint full time. South Carolina architect Robert Mills, in fact, claimed that Fraser and White were prevented from attaining professional standards by their decisions to remain in South Carolina.¹⁷

Despite the failure of the Academy and Charleston artists' troubles with South Carolina patrons, White's historical paintings and genre scenes eventually gained acceptance. In 1833 he received a Picture of Merit Award for his work entitled *The Grave Robbers* and about that time advertisements in Charleston newspapers began extolling his work.¹⁸ For example, the following notice, probably in reference to *Arrival of the Mail*, appeared in the Charleston *Courier* of 1 June 1837: "Our tasteful artist Mr. J. B. White has again employed his pencil in the delineation of our local scenery; and has achieved quite a successful and elegant performance."¹⁹ The advertisement added that the painting was on display at the Broad Street studio of William Keenan and that Keenan proposed to publish an engraving from it. White's paintings often were raffled, with the proceeds going to a favorite cause. After a fire destroyed St. Philip's, White painted *The Burning of St. Philip's Church* and exhibited it in 1838 for the benefit of the organ fund.²⁰ The painting hangs in the church today. His *Unfurling of the American Flag* was purchased by popular subscription and presented to the United States Senate. For reasons unknown, the work was refused, and instead it was given to President Andrew Jackson, who left it to his adopted son in his will.²¹ It passed to the state of South Carolina, but perished in 1865 when General Sherman's men set fire to Columbia. Two other paintings, *The Arrival of the Mail* and *The Interior of the Jewish Synagogue*, have survived and are still in Charleston, the former at City Hall. In 1845 he was awarded a diploma of honorary membership to the National Academy of Design, and in 1850 the South Carolina Institute presented him with a silver medal for the best historical painting shown at their fair.²² White died in 1859 and was buried at St. Philip's. His wry comment in his journal regarding European

artists can also be applied to his life and work: "With both poets and painters, it often happens, that they never live till after they die."

White's schooling under West is reflected in his interest in the historical genre. The four paintings he did between 1810 and 1815, based on events during and legends that arose from the American Revolution, indicate his determination to paint in this genre, despite general public lack of interest in the form. *The Battle of Fort Moultrie* (fig. 1) depicts the famous battle, fought in 1776, that effectively prevented the British from entering the South for two years. Among the figures Blake represented in the painting are William Moultrie, Francis Marion, William Jasper, and Blake Leay White.

In 1779 a group of American prisoners held by the British about two miles north of Savannah were freed by two scouts in Marion's brigade. This rescue was popularized by Parson Weems, the originator of the legend of Washington and the cherry tree, but in this case he based his tale on fact. William Jasper, who had distinguished himself in the Battle of Fort Moultrie, and John



Figure 2. Sergeants Jasper and Newton Rescuing American Prisoners from the British, oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, 1810-15. 24 1/2" x 29 1/2". U. S. Senate Collection, courtesy Senate Curator's Office.



Figure 3. General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal, oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, 1810-15. 24 1/2" x 29 1/2". U. S. Senate Collection, courtesy Senate Curator's Office.

Newton, while visiting Jasper's brother, a loyalist encamped with the British, met the prisoners as they were about to be sent to trial in Savannah. Jasper and Newton decided to save the group and planted themselves at a watering spot where they thought the British would be likely to stop. When the escort arrived and set aside their weapons to take a drink, Newton and Jasper overpowered them. White's painting of Jasper and Newton (fig. 2) depicts the reunion of one of the prisoners with his wife and child and it is believed that it was that particular family's plight that inspired the scouts to rescue the prisoners. Engravings of this painting were made and distributed by the Apollo Association of Fine Arts in the United States, and it also appeared on bank notes issued by South Carolina in 1861.

General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal (figs. 3, 4) portrays one of the many legends that grew from Marion's military exploits during the war. According to tradition, in 1781 the general invited a British officer to have supper with his brigade. The officer, sent by the British to negotiate with Marion for the exchange of prisoners, was amazed at the meager

fare until Marion explained that the soldiers were not paid and provided their own food, all for the sake of fighting for liberty. It is said that the officer was so impressed that he gave up his post shortly thereafter, believing it impossible to defeat such dedicated soldiers. Apparently White was fascinated with this tale, for three different studies depicting the story, all attributed to him, have been located. Engravings of the study now owned by the Capitol also were made by the Apollo Association and, like the painting of Sergeants Jasper and Newton, appeared on 1861 South Carolina notes.

Mrs. Motte Directing Generals Marion and Lee to Burn Her Mansion to Dislodge the British (fig. 5) is also a portrayal of a 1781 Revolutionary War event. Her plantation on the Congaree



Figure 4. General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal, oil on canvas, Charleston, 1810-15. Dimensions not recorded. Photograph courtesy of Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Inc., Spartanburg, S. C.

River between Charleston and Columbia was captured by the British earlier in the war and converted into a supply depot. In May 1781 Marion and General "Light Horse Harry" Lee reclaimed the plantation, and according to tradition, Mrs. Motte insisted



Figure 5. Mrs. Motte Directing Generals Marion and Lee to Burn Her Mansion to Dislodge the British. *oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, 1810-15. 24 1/2" x 29 1/2". U. S. Senate Collection, courtesy Senate Curator's Office.*

that they set fire to her dwelling so that the British would be dislodged. She supposedly handed arrows to the generals, who had them set on fire and shot towards the house. The British, afraid that their store of gunpowder would explode, destroying them, surrendered.²³

These four paintings typify the sort of nostalgic romanticism that characterized American painting for much of the nineteenth century. West and John Singleton Copley had set the stage for the development of this style in the mid-to-late eighteenth century by borrowing aspects of the European Grand Style and heroic traditions to create a sentimental form of neoclassicism. White's four pieces center on the American Revolution, which had occurred some twenty-five years before they were painted, and feature the iconography inherent in what has become known as the "'ideal' aspect of American romanticism."²⁴ Because of his background, White chose to depict heroes and scenes near and dear to the hearts of South Carolinians, Marion in particular. It is possible that he hoped to attract interest in his historical works,



Figure 6. Battle of La Hogue, oil on canvas, Benjamin West, London, 1775-80. 60 1/8" x 84 3/8". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Andrew W. Mellon Fund, acc. 1959.8.1.



Figure 7. Rocky Coast with Banditti, oil on canvas, Washington Allston (1779-1843), Charleston, 1800. 19" x 13 3/4". Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), acc. 2098.

and perhaps the genre in general, by playing to the patriotic sentiments of his Charleston public.

West's influence on White is evident in the theatrical gestures of his Revolutionary figures. *Sergeants Jasper and Newton* in particular reflects West characteristics. The poses and attitudes of the rescuers and the grateful prisoner's wife can be related to those of the father and son in West's *Return of the Prodigal Son*.²⁵ *Battle of Fort Moultrie* also can be likened to several West paintings, *The Battle of La Hogue* (fig. 6), for example. The skirmish involving the group of soldiers in the middle left portion of the Fort Moultrie painting is similar to that of the seamen fighting in the right-hand corner of *The Battle of La Hogue*. However, White's paintings somehow lack the intimacy of West's; White's are more crowded, detached, and distant. Also missing in White's works are the classical motifs, especially clothing and architecture, so inherent in many of West's historical paintings,



Figure 8. *Coast Scene on the Mediterranean*, oil on canvas, Washington Allston, Italy, c. 1820. 39 3/8" x 33". Columbia Museum of Art, MESDA Research File (MRF) S-8827.

signalling White's romantic influences and the movement of American painting in the nineteenth century away from West's neoclassicism.

As Washington Allston was a contemporary of White's, it is not surprising that White's later works took on some of Allston's characteristics. The iconography and hero worship of neoclassical historical scenes were essentially abandoned by Allston who shifted his emphasis toward scenery and landscape and away from human figures. In such works as *A Rocky Coast with Banditti* (fig. 7) and *Coast Scene on the Mediterranean* (fig. 8), Allston depicted men as almost insignificant participants on the grander stage of land and sea. In at least four paintings executed in the 1820s and 1830s, White followed Allston's lead. These works, *Broad Street*, *Arrival of the Mail*, *Interior of St. Philip's Church*, and *The Burning of St. Philip's Church*, all echo Allston's work.

Broad Street (fig. 9), originally thought to have been painted by Charles Fraser, has been attributed to White based on its similarity to other White pieces. Both it and *Arrival of the Mail* definitely resemble such Allston works as *Italian Landscape* and *Moonlight Landscape*.²⁶ In all four works, most of the human activity was confined to the right and right center of the paintings;



Figure 9. *Broad Street*, oil on canvas, attributed to John Blake White, Charleston, c. 1825. 25" x 17". MRF S-13,329.

sky, foliage, and architecture are particularly underscored. White's handling of the buildings in both *Broad Street* and *Arrival of the Mail* (fig. 10) is along the lines of those in *Italian Landscape*.



Figure 10. *Arrival of the Mail*, oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, c. 1831. 24 3/8" x 29 3/16". City of Charleston, MRF S-8518.

Windows and arches abound in the three, for example. However, White chose to portray city street scenes and therefore painted his architecture in a more traditional perspective. It is also interesting to note that *Moonlight Landscape*, which Allston painted in 1819, features a horse, as does *Broad Street*, which dates about 1825.



Figure 11. Interior of St. Philip's Church, oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, 1830s. 36'' x 27 3/4''. MRF S-14,970.



Figure 12. The Burning of St. Philip's Church, oil on canvas, John Blake White, Charleston, 1838. 35 1/2'' x 26 1/2''. MRF S- 14,971.

Apparently by the late 1830s White had developed a style that was more recognizably his own, but there were still traces of Allston's influence in his paintings of St. Philip's. *Interior of St. Philip's Church* (fig. 11) features more figures than his earlier Charleston street scenes, but the same fascination with perspective is present. Again, arches and windows are the predominant architectural characteristics, an Allston trait; however, these elements are much more important factors in White's paintings than they are in Allston's. *The Burning of St. Philip's Church* (fig. 12) could be considered White's fullest piece, for it combines the elements of his earlier historical works with the more melodramatic properties of Allston's romanticism. For example, the activity of the panicking people in *The Burning of St. Philip's Church* is much like the action in *Battle of Fort Moultrie*. However, White handled the burning of the church in a manner that can be compared with Allston's *Ship in a Squall* (fig. 13), which was painted only a year or two before *The Burning*. The interaction of the burning church with the sky is very much like



Figure 13. *Ship in a Squall*, chalk on canvas, Washington Allston, Cambridge, Mass., before 1837. 47 1/4" x 59 1/2". Courtesy of The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Washington Allston Trust.

that of the ship and the clouds in Allston's work. The steeple of St. Philip's pierces the clouds in rough imitation of Allston's ship masts.

Despite the dominant influences of both his master and contemporary, White's work differs from both in his choice of subject matter. His historical paintings and his Charleston street scenes are unique, for they treat topics and views confined to a specific region: the South Carolina Low Country. It can be said that White's background and upbringing had a strong effect on his work, something he chose not to abandon despite his training in England and his visits North. It is possible that, while he cannot be said to have been wildly successful as a painter in South Carolina, the acclaim he did achieve can be attributed to his devotion to his native region and his knowledge of its people.

Mrs. Turner is a former MESDA Summer Institute student and a resident of Salisbury, North Carolina.

FOOTNOTES

1. George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America* (New Haven, 1957), 681; Francis W. Bilodeau and Mrs. Thomas J. Tobias, comps., *Art in South Carolina, 1670-1970* (Charleston, S.C., 1970), 126; Anna Wells Rutledge, *Artists in the Life of Charleston, Through Colony and State from Restoration to Reconstruction*, 1949 (rept., Columbia, S.C., 1980), 136-7.

2. "Records from the Blake and White Bibles," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 36 (1935): 14, 42 (hereafter cited as "Records," *SCHGM*).
3. Paul R. Weidner, ed., "The Journal of John Blake White," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 42 (1941): 64 (hereafter cited as "Journal," *SCHGM*).
4. *Ibid.*, 66; 43 (1942): 38
5. *Ibid.*, 63.
6. *Ibid.*, 62.
7. *Charleston Courier*, 12 Apr. 1804.
8. "Journal," *SCHGM* 43: 103-9.
9. *Charleston Courier*, 24 Feb. 1806.
10. "Journal," *SCHGM* 43: 109-12.
11. "Records," *SCHGM* 36: 46.
12. "Journal," *SCHGM* 43: 168.
13. Walter B. Edgar, ed., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives* 1 (Columbia, S.C., 1974), 299.
14. "Records," *SCHGM* 36: 48-9.
15. Paul Staiti, "The 1823 Exhibition of the South Carolina Academy of Fine Arts: A Paradigm of Charleston Taste?" in David Moltke-Hansen, ed., *Art in the Lives of South Carolinians, Nineteenth Century Chapters* (Charleston, S.C., 1979), PSb: 2-3.
16. Paul Staiti, "Samuel B. Morse in Charleston, 1818-21," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 79 (1978): 107-9.
17. Gene Waddell, "'Where Are Our Trumbulls?'" in Moltke-Hansen, *Art in the Lives*, GWb: 8.
18. William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 1834 (reprint, New York, 1969) 2: 471.
19. Bilodeau and Tobias, *Art in South Carolina*, 155.
20. Rutledge, *Artists in the Life*, 225.
21. "Records," *SCHGM* 37: 69.
22. Rutledge, *Artists in the Life*, 136.
23. The information about the historical events and legends discussed here was gleaned from a rough draft of a catalogue of artworks belonging to the Senate that will be published in the future. Courtesy Office of the Senate Curator, United States Senate Commission on Art and Antiques, Washington, D.C.
24. Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American experience*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1979), 37.
25. Novak, *American Painting*, 40.
26. Edgar Preston Richardson, *Washington Allston: A Study of the Romantic Artist in America* (Chicago, 1948), plates 10, 46.



Figure 1. Plate VI of A Harlot's Progress, engraving, William Hogarth, London, 1732. Dimensions not recorded. This plate, part of a series of engravings, depicts the wake for Moll Hackabout. From Sean Shesgreen, ed., Engravings by Hogarth (New York, 1973).

Coffin Making and Undertaking in Charleston and its Environs, 1705-1820

BRADFORD L. RAUSCHENBERG

On 5 November 1705, the estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Sindrey was charged £73.13.3 for her funeral. Five years later a charge, also against her estate, for £73.18.00 for 155 days of “work at the New houses” by Abraham “Lesware” (Lesueur), joiner, established a price comparison which demonstrates the expense of funerals and their corteges.¹ The Sindrey estate account book provides a rare glimpse of an early eighteenth-century Charleston funeral and thus is offered in its entirety:

Novemr 5 To Cash paid two women Laying out her Corps and Attendance at her funerall	2.00.0
To a winding Sheet and a pr thread Stockings . . .	1.10.3
To a Coffin & ca from Mr. Lesware	7.10.0
To a quarter Cask of wine of Coll. Logan	6.05.0
To 10 gall. more at 6/3 pr Galln	3.02.6
To 8 bottles of Clarret from Mr. Chicken	1.05.0
To 66lb Sugar to burn the Wine [torn]/2	2.01.3
To Spice for ditto of Sundrys	2.00.0
To Cash paid Susan Sawyer for burning ditto . . .	0.10.0
To ditto paid Sundrys for gloves	£.S.D.
Mr. John Acuum 23 pr mens 4 pr Wom[ens] [torn]	0.07.0
Mr. John Breton 9 pr womens at 72pr	1.19.41/2
Mr. Chevalier 2 pare at 6 ryals	0.07.6
Mrs. Murreau 8 pare at 5/	2.00.0
Mrs. Dawson 34 pares Sev[era]l Prices	7.08.11/2

Mrs. Cutler 22 pares at 4/ pare	4.08.0
Mrs. Mazgarot Lea 16 pares at 5/	4.00.0
Mrs. Bisset 35 pares at 2/6 pr.	28.17.6
To 28 yards of Alamode for 8 Scarves for the Minister and Doctor & 6 bearers at 8/9 pr yard	10.10.
To 6 yards of Narrow black Ribbon to tie the Scarves up at 7 1/2 pr yard	0.03.0
To Cash paid Mr. Peter Manigault for his Cart and horses and his own attendance to carry the Corps up to his Plantation	1.10.0
To the use of a Pall	0.10.0
To 25 lb of white bisket to carry to the plantation	0.15.0
To pipes to bacoe and Rosemary	0.10.0
To Cash paid Sundrys for Attendance	1.00.0
To ditto paid the Minister his Attendance and horse hire to the Plantation	2.00.0
To the Sexton for Ringing the bell and digging the Grave	1.00.0
[Total]	£73.00.3 ²

A satirical view (fig. 1) of an early eighteenth century wake depicted in William Hogarth's series of engravings entitled "A Harlot's Progress" gives an idea of how Mrs. Sindrey's funeral was conducted. The engraving also portrays much of the funereal equipage listed above and that will be mentioned in this study: a coffin, coffin hardware, bier stools, a coat of arms, a coffin plate, mourning rings, gloves, scarves, alcohol, and a mourning hat. It also further illustrates some items whose significance can only be surmised. On the stool are what appear to be drumsticks for the mourning procession; on a plate on the floor and in the hand of the woman on the left are what seem to be feathers, perhaps to revive any unconscious females. Smoldering feathers were used at that time in the same capacity as smelling salts.

Unfortunately, there are very few Low Country documents that describe funeral ceremonies. What does survive has been found in wills as personal requests. For example, in October 1759 Joseph Arden specified that: "my pall [fabric coffin covering not fixed to the coffin] be held up by six maidens who shall have the customary requisites given them, and also that a general invitation be sent through the parish, and that gloves be given to such parishioners as shall attend my funeral."³ Frances Legare's

will of November 1800 also contained funeral instructions that her “coffin be made of cedar and covered with superfine black broad cloth and instead of a Pall that my friend Thomas Doughty do buy three yards of superfine black broad Cloth to cover my Coffin with to the Grave, then to be given to Job Palmer.” William Rutledge’s request in his will of 12 March 1822 was even more explicit about his entire funeral: “No invitation, no notice to be taken of my death in newspapers, no crape or mourning or any of that nonsense, and to be conveyed to my grave as early as possible at the beating of the morning drum, coffin of Northward pine covered with black baise.”⁴ These entries are unique for their respective periods, but not much about coffin making can be gleaned from them. The actual mentions of the coffin in the first three were not descriptive, and both Mrs. Legare’s and Rutledge’s only touch on the types of wood they wanted used. After the examination of other types of records, however, a picture of the various selections of coffins and services available in Charleston before 1820 did emerge.

The Sindrey account of 1705 was the earliest Charleston documentation of a joiner — “Mr. Lesware” — being paid for a coffin he undoubtedly made. What the “& ca” in addition to the coffin was will probably never be discovered. It is difficult to determine whether it was material applied to the coffin — crest, fabric, hardware — or Lesueur’s supplying or renting the bier as part of the service rendered. Lesueur also could have somehow been involved with the winding of the sheet around the body or other similar processes which are not understood today, for the role of a joiner as an undertaker in 1705 is unknown. What can be gleaned from the records are the identities of the coffin makers, woods, appointments, costs, and perhaps some of the funeral process.

Estate records are the primary sources for charges for coffins and, at times, to whom payments were made. For example, William Watson was paid £42 for a coffin he made for John Smith in May 1727. The details of coffin quality were not revealed nor were the possible services Watson offered with the coffin. He apparently did more than simply supply coffins. In August 1736 his widow announced the continuation of her late husband’s business, stating that she had: “a considerable stock of fresh goods of all sorts necessary for Funerals, and Workmen fully capable of making Coffins and Cabinet-ware.” The fresh goods probably referred to fabrics, gloves, and possibly rings and coffin hard-

ware. Further evidence of Mrs. Watson's business was found in the estate records of William Bellinger, Sr., planter, from which Mrs. Watson was paid £11.30 for a coffin on 9 April 1744. Charles Warham, a Charleston joiner and cabinetmaker, in an advertisement of 14 August 1736, also emphasized the fact that Watson had been a full participant in preparing a funeral when he stated in a postscript: "I intend likewise to prepare all Things necessary for and take care at Funerals in the same Manner as Mr. Watson deceased did, for all such as think proper to apply themselves to me for that purpose."⁵

John Bedon was another woodworker whose concerns included coffin production. He announced in the *South Carolina Gazette* on 28 February 1735/6 that he "being lately free [of his apprenticeship] now undertakes for himself, House Carpenters and House Joiners work, and also makes Coffins." Later, in September 1736, he advertised again and added that with his coffins he had: "the newest fashion'd furniture, and [the public] will find things proper for Funerals both for Town and Country, and will give his attendance."⁶ Giving his attendance probably meant performing undertaker functions. Edward Weyman, cabinetmaker and upholsterer, was documented in December 1766 as performing such duties when he was paid for "a coffin bell, pall & carriers & ca."⁷ The manner in which the carriers were listed in the inventory suggests that they were not persons hired to transport the coffin, but most likely were portable bier stands such as those used in English churches at that time. As a form,

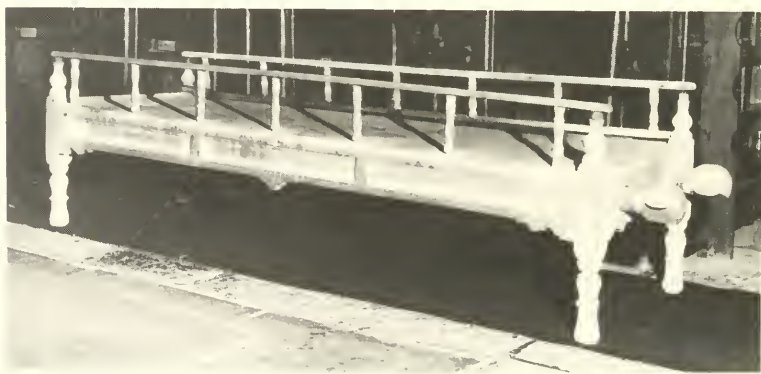


Figure 2. Bier stand, East Brent, Somerset, England, 1734. Oak. HOA 21 1/2", W/OA 86 1/2", DOA 24". MESDA Research File (MRF) B- 332.



Figure 3. Bier stand, East Brent, Somerset, England, 1642. Oak. HOA 21 5/8", W^{OA} 78 1/2", DOA 21 1/4". MRF B-286.



Figure 4. Bier stand, Kedington, Suffolk, England, 1680-1700. Oak. HOA 19 1/4", W^{OA} 77", DOA 22". MRF B-134.

this type of stand (figs. 2, 3, and 4) has fixed legs and hand-grips at each end which can be slid out for carrying. Frequently, two separate joined stools were used as an alternative to the stand; this was being done in England in the seventeenth century. In his diary Samuel Pepys related how he saw his "uncles corps in a coffin, standing upon joynt stools in the chimney in the hall; but it begun to smell, and so I caused it to be set forth in the yard all night and watched by two men."⁸ Since the plural form was cited in Weyman's case, it can be assumed that joined stools were the carriers charged to the estate. A cypress stool (fig. 5) with a Brewton/Manigault family history, thought to be one of these types of stools, has survived and is in the MESDA collection. The height of this stool, twenty-four inches, its top affixed with glue blocks, and the lack of support for its oval edge all lead to the assumption that the stool was not a seat. The S-shaped

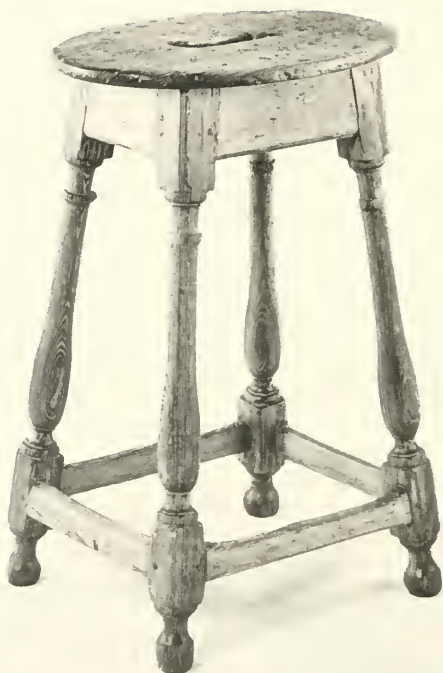


Figure 5. Joined stand, Charleston, 1720-30. Cypress. HOA 24 3/4'', WOA 15 1/4'', 11 3/4''. MRF S-1583, accession 2414-2.

hand-hold in the top (fig. 5a) is the same design as that of stools found in French churches.⁹

Evidence for the use in Charleston of such stools was found in the July 1749 inventory of Archibald Young, carpenter, which contained "2 Coffin Stools £1" along with coffin furniture and carpenters' tools in the shop.¹⁰ Their relatively low value suggests that they were not new, but instead were part of the shop equipment. Therefore, supplying coffin stools was probably part of the funeral services offered by Young. Additional support for this concept appears in the listing of "To 2 Coffen Stools£2" along with shop furniture and coffin furniture in the April 1760 inventory of Thomas Stocks, cabinetmaker. When Michael Muckenfuss, another cabinetmaker, died in 1808, his estate contained "2 Coffin Stools. . . . \$1" along with shop benches, tools, and coffin furniture and boards. In March 1815, yet another cabinetmaker's inventory, that of Hance Fairley, listed "1 pr. Coffin Stools . . . \$1," an indication that stools were still being used in the nineteenth century.¹¹



Figure 5a. Detail of Figure 5.

Most of the early-to-mid-eighteenth century Charleston records cited so far document instances in which joiners made coffins and acted as undertakers. During that period, joiner was an ambiguous term which could be applied to anyone involved in the wood-working trades: carpentry, ship joining, house joining, and cabinetmaking, and it was only when these joiners stated in advertisements that they made furniture that they could be identified as cabinetmakers. When the term cabinetmaker began to be an accepted trade name in Charleston, about 1760, part of its definition at that time appears to have included coffin making and undertaking.

An example of a post-1760 cabinetmaker being involved in the entire funeral process was John Frew's October 1795 advertisement that he had noticed that: "As no person in this city has ever publicly offered to take charge of, and conduct funerals, he offers himself in that line" in addition to his cabinetmaking business. In 1809 "Jacob Sass & Son," cabinetmakers, added to the end of a notice that: "If any person within the vicinity of Charleston should at any time have the misfortune of loosing any of their family, the subscribers will be able to furnish them with ready made COFFINS at the shortest Notice, of any size whatever."¹² "Ready made" and "any size whatever" are key phrases which indicate the undertaking roles played by mid-to-late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century cabinetmakers. That Sass and Son had coffins already made and in their shop implies that they were more than cabinetmakers who occasionally, upon request, made coffins, unlike Thomas Elfe, who did not have coffins of varying sizes on hand in his shop. This is evident in the entry recorded in his account book in 1771 that a coffin was "returned which was made by order too little."¹³

Charleston upholsterers working after 1760 also contributed to funerals. The earliest recorded upholsterer's notice mentioning funerals was that of Edward Godier which appeared in the *Charleston Evening Gazette* of 21 September 1785. After a lengthy description of his abilities, a rider to his announcement stated: "Funerals compleatly furnished." In 1792, at the end of a long advertisement, Thomas Bradford, upholsterer, added: "FUNERALS furnished." In 1793 the firm of Worthington and Kirby advertised "Funerals furnished on the shortest notice."¹⁴

Charleston church records verify that the upholsterers who advertised their abilities to "furnish funerals" were used in that

capacity. For example, on 31 March 1800, the Independent Congregational (Circular) Church incurred expenses for putting both the old building and the new building in mourning for the death of George Washington. Various merchants in Charleston supplied such goods as "8 Yds. Superfine Black B[road] Cloth hung on the Two Pulpits," cashmere, fine black cloth, "34 yds. Durant," black crepe, broad and narrow ribbon, sewing silk, wire, thread, tape, pins and tacks. Joseph Worthington, of Worthington and Kirby, was then paid, on the same day, "For workmanship for preparing and fixing the above mentioned Mourning both Churches 50 Dols. - 76.5.1."¹⁵ John Watson, also an upholsterer, and his partner, cabinetmaker John Anthony Woodill, were paid \$23.5.4 by the church of St. Michael's on 1 August 1800 for putting that edifice in mourning, and again on 28 March 1804 \$3.10 "for putting the pulpit &[c.?] in mourning on the death of Doctor Purcell." Thirteen years later, on 7 August 1817, John Smith, another upholsterer, was given a treasurer's voucher from St. Michael's for dressing the church in mourning. The amount he was paid was undisclosed.¹⁶ From these accounts, it appears that the Charleston upholsterer's involvement in the funeral process was directed more towards furnishing decoration rather than actually contributing to the making of the coffin.

Cabinetmakers and upholsterers were not the only members of the Charleston community who supplied dress, coffins, processions, and other equipage for funerals. On 20 December 1802 the board of the Charleston poor house passed an account to Calhoun and Shrewsbury, carpenters, "For fifty coffins 150 Dollars." John Pickering Lloyd, a Charleston venetian blind maker, advertised in November 1819 that, as well as making blinds, he furnished "Funerals . . . of every description, (as usual) at the shortest notice."¹⁷

As a funeral also involved many items other than the coffin and body, it was not uncommon for merchants to have a hand in the undertaking process. An indication of all that went into a burial was given in the Sindrey Account, and it can be inferred that much of what had been used for her funeral had been acquired through merchants. Evidence of this nature was also found in a November 1755 letter to London merchants Augustus and John Boyd from Henry Laurens concerning the death of Henry Chapone, their Jamaica agent, who was buried in Charleston. Chapone came to Charleston without funds, and his passage to

Charleston as well as his funeral was financed by the Laurens mercantile firm. The letter briefly described the funeral, stating:

We gave away at Mr. Chapones Funeral Scarfs to the Bearers, Clergy, & Doctors also to two Captains of his Majestys Ships with Gloves to each. This is what is always given here by People of any tolerable rank except those to the Captains of the Men of War. The Guests invited were the Gentlemen of any figure in trade & the masters of Ships in the Harbour as they all put their Colours half mast. We think we did not go to one Shilling expence further than was consistent with decency.¹⁸

In 1764 the merchant James Poyas recorded the sale of goods to the estate of Elizabeth Snipes for her funeral. The Snipes funeral preparations purchased from Poyas, by a Mr. Snipes, on 19 September were: "4 1/2 yds Swanskin (for lining the Coffin) a 13/9 . . . £3.1.10. 2 1/2 yds Sup[e]r fine blk broad Cloath a £7.10/ . . . 18.15," as well as bread, cheese, wine, dozens of black gloves, scarves, and handkerchiefs for men, women, and children, and other mourning apparel such as black fans, ribbon, shoes, buttons, stockings and shoe buckles. Snipes spent a total of £318.4.6 at the Poyas store on Elizabeth Snipes's funeral. Another of the Poyas day books revealed that the store paid Farquhar McGillivray, a joiner and carpenter, £52 for Elizabeth Snipes's coffin on 19 September 1764. Other accounts recorded in the four surviving James Poyas Day Books (1760-1766) indicated that coffins were being purchased via the merchant.¹⁹ Coffins apparently often were bought through a store and therefore probably were made to order, which suggests that merchants were agents for coffin makers. Reverend Samuel Warren, when his wife died, did not purchase a coffin through the Poyas store, but did pay for "a sett Coffin Furniture . . . £9.6.3," along with funeral accessories, which totalled £123.7.6.²⁰ From this March 1765 sale it could be inferred that Warren selected the coffin furniture for his wife's coffin and then gave the set to the coffin maker.

The undertaking roles of Charleston's merchants were more often subject to the vicissitudes of the city's political and social climates than those of most cabinetmakers. The Townshend Act of 1767 and other related acts passed by the English Parliament placed a tax burden on the colonies which was felt: "in the Purchase of all Sorts of Goods imported from Great Britain."

As a result, Charleston, like other colonial cities, formed an association which, on 28 June and 22 July 1769 under the guidance of Christopher Gadsden, formed anti-importation resolutions that opposed the acts. These resolutions outlined the British and other foreign goods to be boycotted by colonial merchants, mechanics, and independent purchasers and encouraged the promotion of "NORTH AMERICAN MANUFACTURES in general, and those of this Province in particular." In one of the resolutions, the participants agreed to "use the utmost OECONOMY, in our Persons, Houses and furniture; particularly, that we will give no MOURNING, or GLOVES or SCARVES at Funerals."²¹ The effect of the resolutions on funerals, and on the merchants who trafficked in the mourning trade, can be found in death notices such as that of Solomon Legare in November 1774:

Last Saturday died, aged 71, Mr. Solomon Legare, a native of this Province Neither Scarves, gloves or Mourning were used at this Funeral, altho' he left a very numerous Train of most affectionate relations: who have thereby conformed to the 8th Article of the Association entered into by the late Congress, in Behalf and on the part of the Colonies.²²

On 19 December of that year, a similar disclaimer appeared in the *South-Carolina Gazette*: "The Remains of Mrs. Mary Elliott (the Wife of the Hon. Barnard Elliott) . . . were interred . . . Few have left more Relations, few had more Friends, than this most amiable and excellent Lady, yet the latter clause of the 8th article of the Continental Association was strictly adhered to at this funeral."

After the American Revolution, and before the passing of Thomas Jefferson's embargo of 1808, funerals apparently returned to their former lavish states, and merchants were again called upon to answer the accompanying need for mourning gear. In October 1806, Hill's Ware House, at 26 Church Street, advertised:

FUNERALS . . . The novelty of the UNDERTAKER's Business, in Charleston, having excited much enquiry by some as to what is meant by the term "*UNDERTAKERS*", and by others, (who have only a partial idea of its meaning) how far extends the supplies of one — In order, therefore, to explain to both, and to the public generally, the follow-

ing plan is submitted, viz. To any written or personal application, He will instantly attend at the house of the deceased, and arrange with a friend of the family, every thing necessary for the funeral. Every article of mourning, such as Scarfs, Hoods, Hat Bands, &c. &c. that may be ordered, will be sent to the house of the deceased, at an *early hour, all ready made up*. A coffin, substantially and neatly made, of *any description*, will be furnished, and sent in *proper time*. Dress furnished, of all sizes, ready made, or made to order, as the notice will admit of. Any articles ordered and *not made use of*, will be received back, and deducted from the bill. Either the whole, or any part of the articles necessary for a funeral, will be furnished. To a family labouring under every affliction of grief for the loss of one of its members, it must be evident an establishment of this kind is desirable; it not only prevents the feelings of the surviving relatives from being harrassed by the unavoidable hurry and confusion in providing for a funeral, (particularly when the necessary articles are to be procured with much difficulty) but also impositions from being practiced, by having every thing prepared elsewhere, and brought *all ready made up to be distributed* to those intended for. The *most rigid punctuality* may be relied on in any thing promised, and every delicacy that the solem occasion of a Funeral requires by the "UNDER-TAKER". N. B. The bill for any funeral expences will be presented a few days after the interment, when it will be expected to be punctually paid, as customary.

Another announcement from the same firm appeared the following December and was of a shorter nature: "FUNERALS . . . Furnished complete or in part with coffins, scarves, hoods, hat-bands, handkerchiefs, gloves. . . . There are constantly mourning dresses on hand, and making of all sizes, for gentlemen; such as coats, waistcoats, breeches and pantaloons."²³ The 11 July 1804 death of Mrs. Rachel DuPree Miles of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, left a family whose sorrow was put to canvas (fig. 6) in 1805 by the itinerant artist Cephas Thompson.²⁴ Represented in the portrait are Mrs. Miles's survivors, Captain James Miles, their son James Saunders Miles and daughter Elizabeth McPherson Miles. The urn and open window are symbolic portrayals of the deceased. The subjects' somber expressions, the two funeral hats



Figure 6. James Miles and Children, oil on canvas, Cephas Thompson, 1805. HOA 40 3/4", W/OA 40 3/4". MRF S-8723. The painting is signed at the lower left: "C. Thompson pinx 1805."

for Mr. Miles and his son, the black mourning clothes, and his daughter's black jewelry complete the mourning scene.

The use of such mourning items as scarves and crepe in Charleston after 1810 was recorded in an April 1816 letter from Catherine Waties to Frances Caroline Mayrant, and perhaps reflected the effect Jefferson's embargo had on the items used by South Carolinians for their funerals: "but my dear Frances it really is shocking to see in Charleston how much indifference persons show at the death of their friends, their mourning is ridiculous, canton crepe frock trimmed with crepe, & a scarlet hat & shawl."²⁵ Coffins were also apparently still stock items for merchants in the first and second decade of the nineteenth century. In July 1808 Thomas Hill's warehouse inventory listed "2 full trimmed Mahogany Coffins 15. \$30."²⁶



Figure 7. Gold mourning ring with black enamel inset mounted with clear stone and amethyst, inscribed "ROBT MACKEW'N OB: 16 DEC 1764 AET 38," South Carolina? Diameter: 7/8". MRF S-8534.

Although it appears that mercantile firms were a major source of funeral trappings, some items could also be had from silversmiths. For example, Charleston silversmith John Paul Grimke, on 30 December 1760, had for sale "Mourning swords, buckles, necklaces, rings with or without diamonds, and other articles used on such occasions."²⁷ More northern mourning jewelry has been recorded than southern; however, the survival of two rings with Charleston histories illustrates the custom of giving rings as funeral gifts to very close friends, relatives and, at times, ministers. One of these rings (fig. 7) was made for Robert Mackewn, Jr. It has a single amethyst and two clear stones mounted on a scrolled gold band filled with black enamel which provides a ground for gold letters that read: "ROBT. MACKEWN OB: 16 DEC 1764 AET 38." The other (fig. 8), honoring Elizabeth Manigault has a gold band edged with beading. It is filled in the center with black enamel and inscribed in gold: "ELIZA: MANIGAULT . DYED . 19 . FEBRY . AGED . 36 . YEARS"; on the interior is an "EP" touch mark. Robert Mackewn was a planter who died in 1764. Elizabeth Manigault, nee Wragg, died in 1773; she was the wife of Peter Manigault and the mother of Gabriel Manigault, the architect. Grimke's sales of such



Figure 8. Gold mourning ring marked "EP", inscribed "ELIZA: MANIGAULT DYED. 19 . FEBRY . AGED . 36. YEARS," South Carolina? 1773. Diameter: 13/16". MRF S-8534.

mourning items as part of his trade forecast the Charleston silversmith's transition from smith to jeweler, a change that occurred in the late eighteenth century and dominated the early nineteenth.

The role that upholsterers, carpenters, silversmiths, and even Venetian blind makers played in supplying the Charleston public with funeral dressing was, as a rule, more that of the contributor or decorator than actual coffin maker. Even those merchants such as Poyas and Hill who sold coffins hired woodworkers such as McGillivray to make them. Cabinetmakers were most likely to make coffins and furnish them with the necessary equipage for burial; *The Cabinet-Makers Philadelphia and London Book of Prices* of 1796 even contained descriptions and charges for coffin work. Such information is rare, so the following has been reprinted:

COFFINS. A coffin two feet long in the bottom[£]	0.6.6.
Ditto two feet six inches long	0.8.0.
Ditto three feet long	0.9.6.
Ditto three feet six inches long	0.10.6.
Ditto four feet long	0.12.0.
Ditto four feet six inches long	0.13.6.
Ditto five feet long	0.15.0.
All above five feet long	0.18.0.
All coffins made of poplar above five feet long to deduct	0.3.0.
Putting on handles to ditto	0.1.0.
Ditto the breast plate	0.0.6.
Full trimming with lace	0.1.6. ²⁸

One of the first considerations Charleston coffin makers had to contend with in building a coffin was the wood he should use. Cedar, mahogany, pine, and cypress were their choices; no other coffin woods have been recorded in Charleston documents. Cedar apparently was used the most. Evidently it was considered to be the most durable of the coffin woods. In 1809 David Ramsay wrote: "Red cedar, *juniperus virginiana*, makes durable furniture, posts, and coffins. On the plantation of Thomas Drayton, in St. Andrews, an inscription on wood of this species in 1706, indicates the grave of Stephen Fox [a tanner]. There is no tombstone in Charleston equally old on which time has made so little impression."²⁹ In fact, the earliest coffin found in Charleston was

of cedar. During the repair of the foundations of St. Michael's Church after the 1886 earthquake, a cedar coffin with the initials "J O B" and "1678" nailed in brass was uncovered.³⁰

Cedar was also requested by eighteenth-century testators in their wills when they mentioned the making of their coffins. For example, in March 1741 Joseph Fidler, a Charleston upholsterer, asked for "a plain coffin of cedar." In their wills of September 1758 and October 1759, respectively, Michael Jeans, a painter and glazier, and Joseph Arden also specified cedar as the wood they wished to be used for their coffins.³¹ Charleston cabinet-makers' eighteenth century accounts also refer to the popularity of cedar as a coffin wood. Abraham Roulain, a cabinetmaker, made Thomas Sanders a "full trimmed cedar coffin" for £35 in September 1765.³² Throughout Elfe's account book there are records of charges, from 1772 to 1775, for cedar coffins which range in price from £2.10 "for a child" to £90 for a "full trimmed black cov'd Cedar Coffin."³³ The latter charge was more than the greatest charge for a mahogany coffin.

Cedar was used in Charleston in the nineteenth century as well. The February 1802 shop inventory of Nicholas Silberg, cabinetmaker, mentioned "2 Setts Cedar Coffin Stuff \$4" which undoubtedly represents coffins that were not yet constructed. A similar listing was found in Michael Muckenfuss's September 1808 shop appraisal which included: "2 Setts Cedar Coffin Boards \$12." Jacob Sass's February 1836 inventory listed: "23 Cedar Coffins \$115 . . . 37 Small do. [cedar] Coffins \$18.50."³⁴

There is also documentary evidence that pine was commonly used in Charleston to make coffins, although it does not seem to have come into fashion until the end of the eighteenth century. On 24 June 1793 James Burns charged £14 for "1 Pine Stain'd Coffin."³⁵ This account appears to be the first recorded use of pine for coffins, and as it was in 1793 the pine could have been either yellow or white, although the latter is the most probable. White pine coffins were used in Charleston in the nineteenth century; for example, in his will of 12 March 1822, William Rutledge requested that his coffin be "of Northward pine covered with black baise." In May 1821 cabinetmaker Thomas Charnock was paid \$5 for "a pine Coffin Stain'd." Sass's 1836 inventory also listed "3 Pine Coffins \$3 [and] 25 do. \$6."³⁶

With these discoveries in mind, a search of Elfe's account book for pine coffins was made, but to no avail. He did use cypress, however. Cypress appeared occasionally in accounts such as that

of 21 February 1773 which mentioned a charge of £5 for a “Black Cypress Coffin for a Negro Boy ” and “a cypress coffin blackened for a child £3.10” recorded on 10 August 1774. The majority of Elfe’s cypress coffins were made for slaves and ordered by owners, which implies that cypress was considered inferior to cedar. This theory is also supported by the price of cedar coffins in Elfe’s accounts, which ranged from £3.10 to £10.³⁷ On 3 May 1850 Charles Warham was paid £11 for “making coffins for Indians” in February of that year.³⁸ The low cost of these coffins suggests that Warham had made them from cypress.

Mahogany generally was the highest-priced coffin material in Charleston. Elfe charged from £35 to £60 for several coffins of mahogany, while his mahogany bedsteads were only priced from £8 to £50. In September 1793 Jacob Sass was owed £8 for “a Mahogy Coffin with Handles and Plates” and only £5 for a mahogany bedstead. In his 1836 inventory there were “49 Pieces of Coffin Mahog [and] 9 mahy. Coffin tops \$9.”³⁹

After the wood was chosen and the coffin was built, the matter of furnishing the product arose. Apparently this was done according to the current mode. Bedon’s mention of coffin furniture in the newest fashion is also probably what Warham had in mind when he advertised in November 1734 that he made: “Coffins of the newest fashion, never as yet made in Charlestown.”⁴⁰ Coffin furniture was described for the public in March 1739/40 by Josiah Claypoole, from Philadelphia, when he announced his arrival in Charleston and stated that he had: “Coffin Furniture of all sorts, either flour’d, silver’d or plain.”⁴¹ This reference to the range of furniture for coffins suggests that the selection could be made by the deceased’s family. Shop accounts usually indicated that the quality of coffins sold ranged from plain to fully trimmed. “Plain” indicated that the hardware might have been iron. If this was the case, it is possible that it was painted or close-plated and lacquered to simulate gold.⁴² Inventories at times included coffin furniture. Some were general in description such as “parcel of coffin furniture” or brief, as in the case of John Leay, a joiner, turner, chairmaker and house carpenter, whose 24 February 1742/3 inventory included “7 Dozen Coffin handls and 2 Grose of Squares.” Others were very informative. For example, the inventory of Samuel Kennaston, a Charleston merchant, taken about 1754 listed: “10 Sets of Lacqd. Coffined Work 2.5: 7 Dozn. Squares 10/6 3 M Small Do 5/ 5 Sets Silvered Coffin Work & 5 Dozn. Squares 1.8.6 10 Sets

of Childs Squares & Nails 1.8.7.” Merchant John Jones’s April 1764 inventory also contained references to coffin furniture. These included: “3 Setts Silver’d Coffin furniture 5/ -15- 1 Sett Lackquered Furniture Do .4.6 2 Setts Childs Do [coffin furniture] 2/6 -5- 1 Sett Do .3.6 3 Setts Do Head Plates 5/6 .16.6 3 Setts Silvered Do 4/ -12-.”⁴³

Just what amount or forms constituted a set is not known, despite the frequency of the term’s use. The April 1768 inventory of William Hall, carpenter, contained “1 Broken Sett of Gilt Coffin furniture.” Further, in merchant Thomas Corker’s shop inventory of June 1771, seventy-five sets of coffin furniture totalling £12.10 were listed.⁴⁴ It is unfortunate that it is not known how these sets varied, although descriptive advertisements such as Weyman and Carne’s notice in the *South Carolina Gazette* on 6 April 1765 provide some insight:

[Imported from London] A compleat assortment of Coffin furniture, consisting of contrast gilt, compartment ditto, lacquered and plain ditto, mens, youths and childrens handles, squares [for corners of coffins], lacing, large and small letters and figures, brass nails and tacks, gilt, silver’d and lacquer’d, black broad cloth, with swan-skin and tassels for full trimm’d coffins.

Charles Watts’s account books contain an enumeration of “Goods purchased [in] Liverpool” in September 1805, amongst which was “Coffin Furniture” with a description of what was acquired. At this writing, the early-nineteenth century account is the most extensive delineation alluding to all the goods that made up coffin furniture. Unfortunately, his list is confusing and too full of abbreviations for a reproduction in this study. It appears that he mainly was purchasing metal coffin plates, described variously as white, white and black, gilt, gilt and black, as well as handles, nails, lace, and white “Angels & flowers.”⁴⁵ Watts, a Charleston cabinetmaker, travelled in Britain from 1803 to 1804, and 1805 to 1806. After that, he was rarely in Charleston and he died in New York City. Thus, it is not clear just where the goods listed in his accounts were stored. However, since Jacob Sass was purchasing coffin furniture from the Watts firm in 1810 and as Robert Walker, another Charleston cabinetmaker and Watts’s former partner, was appointed attorney for his accounts

while he was travelling, it can be assumed that any goods being sold by Watts were available in Charleston.

The meaning of some of the terms used in conjunction with coffin furniture such as sets and fully trimmed, already discussed, may never be completely defined. The exact nature of the lacing mentioned in Weyman and Carne's 1765 notice and Watts's accounts also is not known. That it was connected to the "Full trimming with lace," from the previously cited *Cabinet-makers Philadelphia and London Book of Prices* there is little doubt, but what that meant is difficult to determine. The term appeared again in Muckenfuss's 1808 inventory as "1 Lott Coffin Lace \$4." ⁴⁶

There are some phrases and terms used by coffin makers and undertakers working before 1820 that have been defined or whose meanings have been gleaned in context. For example, part of the task of furnishing coffins was putting a finish on the coffin furniture. In June 1768 Isaac Motte and Company charged George Wilkes, cabinetmaker, £2.14.0 for "Lacquering 6 Coffin Setts." Finish was probably being referred to in May 1743 when the inventory of John Bee, a Charleston carpenter, listed "A Parcel of Coffin Furniture £20" and "3 Setts Coffin Stuff Prepared £8." "Prepared" probably meant lacquered. Pine and cypress coffins were occasionally stained and painted. Elfe's account book frequently mentioned "black'd" coffins, and in 1821 Thomas Charnock described "a pine Coffin Stained" in one of his bills. The only color of paint used that was indicated in documents was black. ⁴⁷

For a more finished appearance and a higher price, coffins apparently were both lined and covered with fabric. Farquhar McGillivray, in 1762, charged Dr. Cholmondely Dering for "1 Full trim'd blk do [coffin] for Mrs. Dering 82 [and] 1 Full trim'd lind Coffin yr [your] Son £16." Elfe's account book reveals that flannel was one of the fabrics used for this purpose. In July 1771 he charged £47 for: "a full trim'd cedar coffin lined with flannel"; for two such coffins, the price was £90. ⁴⁸ The Snipes account recorded in the Poyas daybook cited earlier also indicated that swanskin was used for lining coffins. The lining and covering of the coffin was not always left up to the estate administrators or coffin furnishers. Frances Legare, in November 1800, specified in her will, already cited, that she wanted her coffin covered with black broad cloth and lined with white flannel.

Finished brass and other metals were also part of the definition of coffin furniture. The “2 Yellow Ditto [Sets of Coffin Furniture] \$4 [and] 21 Single Yellow Plates” listed in Muckenfuss’s estate appraisal probably referred to finished brass. The estate of Ellicott Storey, a Beaufort, South Carolina, cabinetmaker, contained “white coffin Furniture” in May 1755; in all likelihood this was bright finished steel or tinned steel. Tinned steel also was mentioned in William Randall’s estate inventory of October 1755 as: “Some tin[ned] Rusty Coffin Work 10/.”⁴⁹

Coffin nails also were included among the sets of coffin furniture. In January 1758 Joseph Ward’s estate inventory listed: “25 Bundles of coffin & chair nails £25.”⁵⁰ Apparently, there was a visual difference between coffin and chair nails. Edward Weyman was one of the appraisers of Ward’s estate and, as an upholsterer, he probably was familiar with the types. This separation of nails appeared in other inventories such as that of John Jones taken in 1764: “3 M white coffin nails 7/ 21/. 2 1/2 M Brass Do 6/6.” were listed after “1 Sett Desk Furnr. 3/6. 1 1/2 M Brass chair nails 8/8 -13-. 3 M Do 6/6 19/6 1 1/2 M Do 5/6 8/3 1.7.9.”⁵¹ These coffin nails, then, were made of, or perhaps headed with, white steel, tin, or brass. An entry in Elfe’s account book indicates that coffin nails had decorative purposes as well. In July 1772 he charged £8 for “a cedar coffin small with handles I. M. in nails £8.”⁵² These were undoubtedly the initials of the deceased.

Buttons were other decorative items used by coffin makers. In Thomas Stocks’s 1760 inventory they were listed as “to Coffen Furn: To a m Buttons £3.12.6” and “to a parcel of Bullins £2.2.6.” The 14 April 1777 store inventory of James Milligan, merchant, was somewhat more explicit: “8 Dozn Small Death Head Buttons 2/ per doz -16- 16 Large Do Do 4/ pr doz 3.4. 1 3/4 Dozn Large Silver Death Head Do 3/9 .6.6 3/4.” In 1785 George Cobham’s store contained: “52 Bags of Death Head & Cold [gold?] Buttons 2/ [£]5.4.”⁵³ An early nineteenth century trade catalogue in the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur libraries depicts a design for a coffin handle, which may have been metal or brass. On the handle are two heads (fig. 9) that could be interpreted as “death heads.” Unfortunately, it is not clear how buttons were used on coffins, and none have survived. It is possible that they were sewn on the coffin lining as decoration.

The most descriptive coffin cited in Elfe’s account book was

made in 1775: “A mahog coffin lined with flannels gilt plates and handle & mould[ings] at top and bottom £60.”⁵⁴ These plates may have been head plates inscribed with the deceased’s name or initials for the lid of the coffin, such as those mentioned in John Jones’s 1764 inventory. There were various types of head plates. Watts bought a number of varieties in Liverpool. Edward G. Sass advertised in November 1818 that he had: “About 19 doz. gilt and white single coffin Plates” in his warehouse. Jacob Sass, Edward’s father, stated virtually the same thing in a newspaper notice of the same year, but enumerated a little more: “a few dozen gilt and white single Coffin Breast Plates.” Jacob Sass’s 1836 inventory was even more descriptive: “34 large Coffin Plates \$8. 32 White Plates \$4. 47 small plates \$3.”⁵⁵



Figure 9. Detail of a page from a nineteenth century trade catalogue, showing a design for a coffin handle with death heads. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection, Trade Catalogue TS 573 B61f* T. C.

Metal head plates were costly. In 1808, according to Muckenfuss’s inventory, twenty-one brass plates were valued at \$10 and nine finished steel plates cost \$4.40.⁵⁶ Evidence for less expensive plates, which probably were wooden, was found in Alexander

Crawford's day book of 1787-90 which included charges made to William Jones, cabinetmaker, in October and November of 1788 for: "Painting a coffin 0.4.8. Ditto do Marken plate 0.4.8. painting a coffin plate 0.4.8." For two years Crawford painted coffin plates for Jones. He also painted them for George Watson, another cabinetmaker, in 1787 and Fowler and Brodie, carpenters, in 1791, charging 4s.9d. for two plates.⁵⁷ Another painter, James Badger, advertised in 1789: "Coffin plates neatly lettered, at two shillings each, cash."⁵⁸ The least expensive way of placing a name on a coffin was to form the deceased's initials with nails. For example, the 1678 cedar coffin uncovered at St. Michael's Church in Charleston after the 1886 earthquake was marked "J O B" and "1678" with brass nails. Elfe also used nails to letter a coffin he made for John Miles in 1772.

The remarkable survival of coffin furniture from a very important Williamsburg funeral illustrates some of the pieces discussed above; it is likely that the Williamsburg versions of these components did not differ much from their Charleston counterparts. The 15 October 1770 death of Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt (Lord Botetourt), shortly after he became the governor-general and commander in chief of the Virginia colony in 1763, precipitated such a response from his constituents that £700 was spent on his funeral. Among these costs were Williamsburg silversmith William Wadill's 19 October 1770 charges to Botetourt's estate, namely: "To 8 Silver handles and 16 escutcheons for his Lordships Coffin £12. To 1 Large Silver plate engrav'd [£] 8."⁵⁹ Despite a turbulent past, the silver coffin plate (fig. 10) has survived, as have twelve of the silver handles and escutcheons with their posts (figs. 11, 12).⁶⁰ Although Botetourt's coffin furniture was most likely more elaborate than most, it is possible that some of the wealthier and more important Charlestonians would have had coffins furnished similarly.

After the coffin was constructed and furnished and the body laid in state, the coffin had to be conveyed to the burial ground. An 1805 Charleston city ordinance revealed that all bodies were not treated with care and consideration regarding the funeral procession. This ordinance "to prevent the throwing of dead human bodies into the rivers, creeks, or marshes, within limits of the harbor of Charleston" was in April 1807 so "shamefully violated, in a manner shocking to humanity, outrageous to common decency, and greatly endangering the health of the citizens" that a reward of \$200 was offered for the apprehension

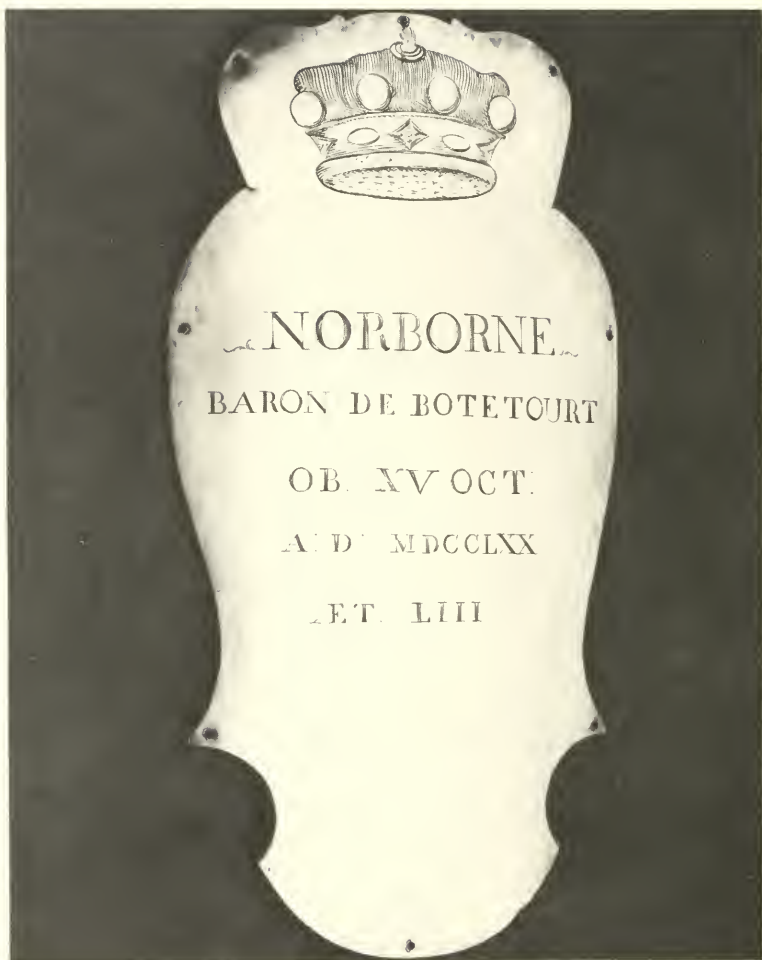


Figure 10. Silver coffin plate, attributed to William Wadill, inscribed "NORBORNE/ BARON DE BOTETOURT/ OB: XV OCT:/ A: D: MDCCLXX/ AET LIII," Williamsburg, 1770. HOA 10", WOA 5 1/4". Collection of the College of William and Mary, photograph courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



Figure 11. Silver coffin handles and escutcheons, attributed to William Wadill, Williamsburg, 1770. Escutcheon: HOA 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ "', WOA 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Courtesy of University Archives, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.



Figure 12. Silver coffin handles, escutcheons, and posts, attributed to William Wadill, Williamsburg 1770. Bales: LOA 4¼." Posts: LOA 1⅛." Courtesy of University Archives, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

of offenders.⁶¹ However, for the most part, the coffin was solemnly and carefully transported in some manner to the burial ground. It can be assumed that the artisan performing the role of undertaker was involved in this process; however, Charleston records are not forthcoming on the matter. Charleston nineteenth century newspapers abound with notices similar to the following, which ran in the *Southern Patriot and Commercial Advertiser* on 3 June 1817: "The Friends and Acquaintances of Messrs. Jacob Sass and John E. Schirmer, are requested to attend the Funeral of Mrs. MARGARET H. SCHIRMER, *This Afternoon*, at 5 o'clock, from No. 100, Queen Street." From this announcement it can be inferred that, as the funeral was being held in a private home, the coffin had to be carried in some way to the graveyard. In some cases this would have been a good distance, and it is difficult to envision human carriers bearing such a weight for such a time. It is probable that some sort of hearse or carriage, even if it was a simple wagon, was used. For example, the charges to Elizabeth Sindrey's estate included payment made to Peter Manigault "for his cart and horses and his own attendance to carry the Corps up to his plantation." That document is the only Charleston record that mentions any method of carrying a coffin or corpse. A search of the advertisements, receipts, and effects of Charleston's coachmakers, in hopes that they might have alluded to making a hearse or related vehicle, came to naught. Such an expensive item was made to order and undoubtedly would not be offered for sale in an advertisement.

The final part of the burial sometimes required a woodworker's further services, if a wooden marker was used to identify the grave site rather than one made of stone. Obtaining a stone grave marker in Charleston meant that a local stone carver depended upon the importation of stone either as dressed slabs or partly finished gravestones. The expense involved in the purchasing of an imported stone could not be met by all families, and thus wooden grave boards were a viable alternative. Probably the best-known reference to a wooden grave marker is in *Rip Van Winkle*. When Van Winkle awoke and returned to his village, he was told that Nicholas Vedder was "'dead and gone these eighteen years! There was a wooden tombstone in the church-yard that used to tell all about him, but that's rotted and gone too.'" ⁶²

Charleston records frequently mention wooden grave boards, and a few actual examples have been recorded. In 1809 David Ramsay mentioned the earliest Charleston wooden grave marker

(1706) when he discussed the attributes of red cedar. The design of this cedar grave marker was not discussed, but it is likely that it followed a traditional eighteenth century form that research has revealed had precedents in Great Britain, and, according to documents, was common in New England. This form, generally referred to as “posts and rail,” had its roots in the south-central part of England where an abundance of wood and difficulties transporting stone resulted in a preference for wooden grave boards. A mid-seventeenth century example found in a graveyard in Sussex consists of an inscribed rail mounted between two upright posts, a design used well into the nineteenth century.⁶³ Other examples of the posts and rail form of wooden grave boards have been observed in the graveyard of St. Mary’s and St. Clement’s Church (fig. 13) in Clavering, Essex, as well as in the Hampstead area of London.



Figure 13. Grave board in the churchyard of St. Mary and St. Clement, Clavering, Essex, England, c. 1800. Oak. HOA (at posts) 40", W/OA 77". MRF B-256.

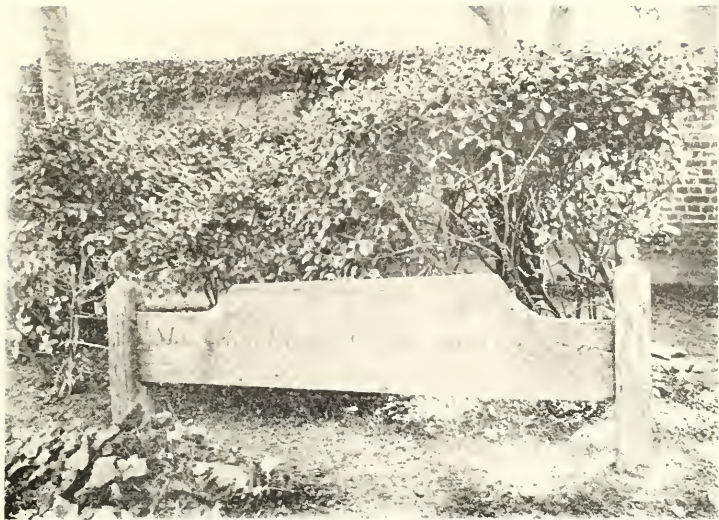


Figure 14. Grave board in the churchyard of St. Michael's, inscribed "[top missing] of Mary Ann Luyten Wife of Willm. Luyten/ Died Sept. 9th 1770 in the 27th year of her Age," Charleston. Cypress. HOA (at post) 30 1/2", WOA 83". Photograph courtesy of Hillyer Rudisill, Historian, St. Michael's Church.

The migration of seventeenth century woodworkers from the southern English counties to New England, according to records, brought the posts and rail style to New England, although no actual examples have survived there. Suffolk and Middlesex County, Massachusetts, probate records contained several charges mentioning the form from 1658 to 1679, such as "a coffin & Railes for the Grave" and "to Mr. Carter Joiner for the Coffine posts." There was a variation in terminology in an Essex County, Massachusetts, account for 1710 in which Samuel Symonds, a joiner, was paid for "two fram[e]s set on fathers and mothers grave." Benno Forman suggested that frames could be a description of posts and rails.⁶⁴

Low Country records do not use the phrase posts and rail, although the wording of certain documents suggests that the form was used. However, two actual posts and rail grave boards have survived, representing many that have long since disappeared from the Low Country soil. Of the two, only one (fig. 14) exhibits a legible inscription and date. This board, two posts with a single

cypress board, is inscribed "[top lost] of Mary Ann Luyten Wife of Willm. Luyten/Died Sept 9th 1770 in the 27th year of her Age"; Mrs. Luyten was buried in St. Michael's graveyard in Charleston. Her husband was a Charleston cabinetmaker who was active at the time of her death, and it is possible that he made the grave board himself. It is missing a portion of its top, undoubtedly a low curve which, when complete, resembled the end of a bedstead. The two posts, of which only one is original, were pointed and fluted on the front and rear. Tenoned into these was the incised board which was filled with white paint. A photograph of the board was published in 1906, and its description stated that it was "Formerly a much used form of memorial." The author apparently was aware of others.⁶⁵ This grave board has now been replaced with a modern rendition of the original. Another similar grave board has been placed on a circa 1775 child's grave in St. Michael's graveyard, but it is modern and does not necessarily represent an original.

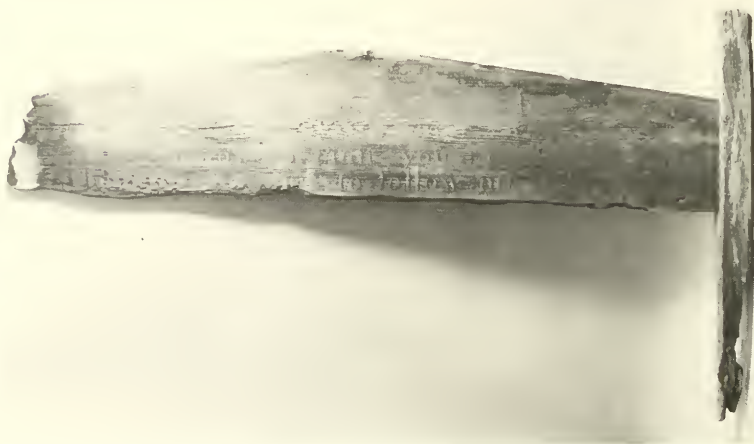


Figure 15. Grave board, St. James Santee, South Carolina, late eighteenth century. Cypress. HOA (at posts) 42", WOA 76 1/2". MRF-13,808.

The other example (fig. 15) of a surviving posts and rail grave board was in the graveyard of the Old Parish Church of St. James Santee, near Echaw Creek. Until it was removed in 1986, it was the only other known example of its type in situ. Now in the Charleston Museum, this grave board has lost one post, and its

remaining post and cypress inscription board have suffered the ravages of a graveyard fire. The inscription on both sides was painted, but not incised. Although the soft cypress board was worn away, the inscription was protected from the elements. Raised lettering now devoid of paint was the result. There is a verse on each side; however, there is no name or death date. The style of the lettering appears to be late eighteenth century, as does the first verse which has been seen in similar literature elsewhere:

Remember man now passing by,
What you [are] now, so once was I.
As I am now, so must you be,
Therefore prepare to follow me.

The reverse reads:

Far distant from my [na]tive Land:
O'er Neptunes W[ater] I've Cros'd
In[t]urr'd I am with S[trangers] here,
But with my K [illegible]

The inscription board is chamfered on its top and peaks in the center. There appears to have been a nailed element, probably of lead, which covered an inch of the top edge perhaps to protect it from the elements. The single surviving top notched post receives the board's tenon and is affixed with three pegs; like the Luyten example, it also resembles the end of a bedstead.

Other evidence indicates the popularity of posts and rail grave boards in Charleston. For example, two of several extant paintings by the Charleston artist Francis C. Hill (1784-1857) depict a total of eight posts and rail grave boards. Active in Charleston from 1799 to 1843 and a member of St. John's Lutheran Church and the German Friendly Society, Hill painted, in oil, two views of his church, one of which, entitled "Back View" (fig. 16), was signed and dated in 1818. It can be assumed that the other, "South View," (fig. 17) was done about the same time; the wooden church was removed in 1818. The grave boards represented in both paintings are the same peaked board style as the St. James Santee board, and the posts have knob tops. The grave boards painted in detail have black outlines that surround the bold initials of the deceased. Two smaller representations possibly depict children's graves.



Figure 16. St. John's Lutheran Church, East View, oil on canvas, Francis C. Hill (1784-1857), Charleston, 1818. HOA 17", WOA 23 1/4". MRF S-9151. This painting is signed: "F. C. Hill fecit 1818." The grave board is in the lower left-hand corner under the tree.

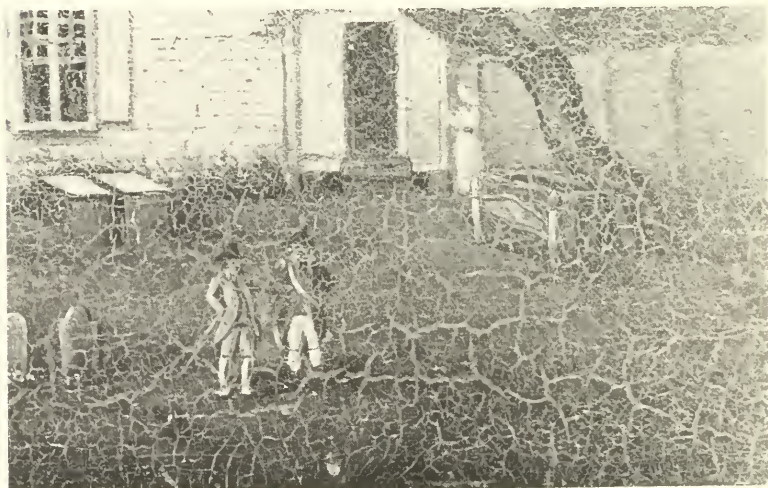


Figure 16a. Detail of Figure 16.



Figure 17. St. John's Lutheran Church, South View, oil on canvas, Francis C. Hill, Charleston, c. 1818. HOA'' 18 1/2'', W'OA 24 1/4''. MRF S-9155. Seven grave boards are portrayed in the lower part of this view.



Figure 17a. Detail of Figure 17.

Hill's sketchbook, which contains the original 1799 watercolor sketches of both paintings, also includes a watercolor of a 1784 single flat grave board (fig. 18), the other form of wooden marker popular in Charleston in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶⁶ A basket of flowers in a down-curved C-scroll supported by paired S-scrolls was carved on its top, surmounting a rope-bordered square that contains a verse inscription and a 1784 date. The name of the deceased was omitted. Hill identified the sketch as "Grave board in Lutheran Church Yard Charleston So. Ca. Copied from the Original by Francis C. Hill, June 1835." It is unfortunate that none of these boards have survived, for their rococo carving and polychrome finish must have added a startling warmth to segments of the graveyard. Henry Hainsdorff, a Charleston carver and gilder, may have done the type of work described above. When he died in February 1796, his estate inventory listed the following trade related material: "1 Lot carved Work [£] 8. . . . 2 Chests of Carvers tools 100/ . . . 1 lot carved Graves and Horses Heads 14/ [for a total of] 15.16." Alexander Crawford undoubtedly lettered such grave boards. Among the 30 April 1790 charges recorded in his daybook were "Mrs. Chambers . . . to 214 Letter[s] [of] witting on A Grave board . . . £2.0.0."⁶⁷

The use of grave boards as markers and their placement in graveyards in Charleston before 1820 can be gleaned from church records and city regulations. In the vestry minutes of St. Philip's Church for 4 March 1773, the following notation was found:

Whereas it has been found that the erection of head & foot stones & wooden monuments in the Churchyard is attended with the same inconvenience in the erection of Tomb Stones . . . no person or persons be hereto allowed to erect or [illegible] the same in the said Yard but that he or they have liberty to place them even with the surface of the earth or against the back of the Yard.

At a meeting the following month, the vestry of another Charleston Church, St. Michael's, during a discussion of graveyard space, resolved that: "no Inclosures should be put up in the said Church Yard. Also that no Board extending the Length of the Graves should be allo'd off — and that none but Board or Stone at the Head & Feet of Graves should be permitted."⁶⁸ It would

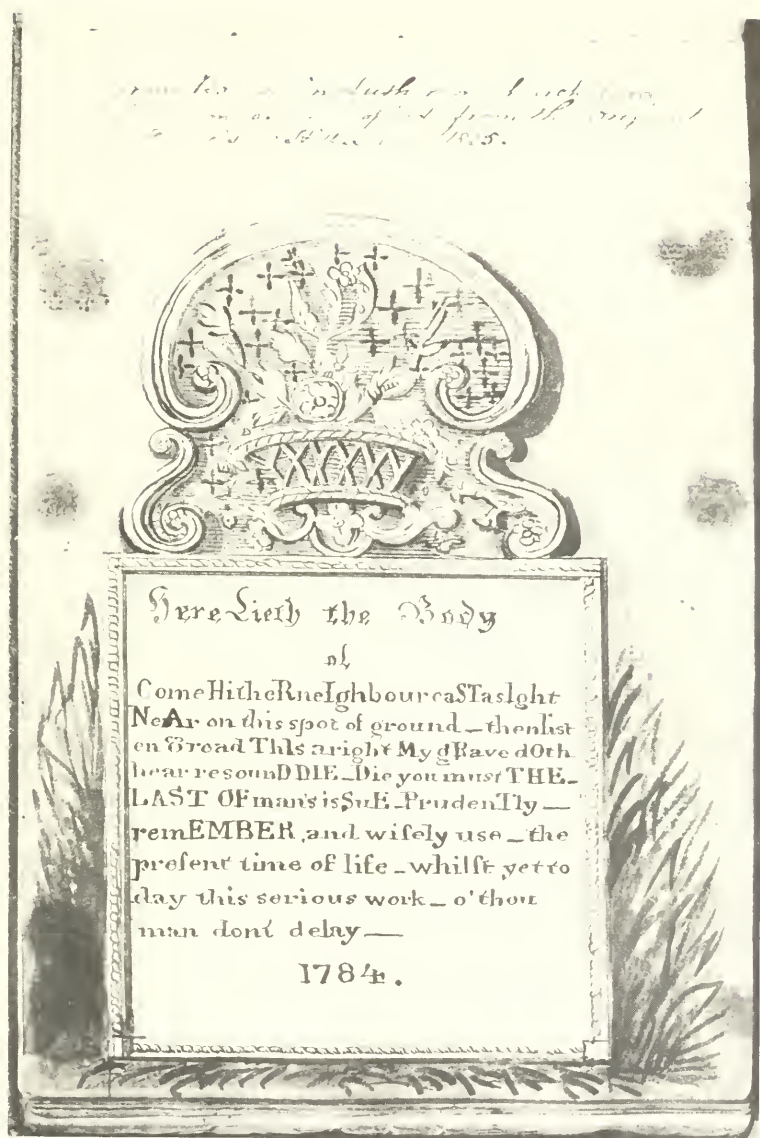


Figure 18. Grave Board in Lutheran Church Yard, watercolor sketch, Francis C. Hill, Charleston, 1835. Dimensions not recorded. MRF S-9314.

seem from the latter restriction that a style of grave identification was being eliminated. If the vestry was not referring to fencing or boarding around graves, it is possible that they were discussing a type of posts and rail marking similar to the Luyten example that was run lengthwise with the grave. It is no wonder that, with space at a premium, the posts and rail form eventually became inconvenient in Charleston. In the more spacious yards of the smaller churches outside the city, which were not confined by streets, this custom could continue, hence the later date of the St. James Santee board.

Plain wooden grave boards remained in favor in the nineteenth century long after the disappearance of posts and rails, for they were inexpensive. A city ordinance ratified on 18 August 1802 outlined charges arising from burials. Among these were: "For opening ditto [a grave], and attending to the erection of any form over a grave, if of wood [\$].25 . . . For ditto, ditto, if of any other materials than wood [\$]1." ⁶⁹ Edward Hooker's 1805-1808 diary included a description of the Columbia, South Carolina, public burial ground that also supports the concept that any markers other than plain wooden grave boards were too costly for those interred within the grounds:

The public burying ground is in a pleasant and retired spot, east of the town — surrounded on three sides by copses of native pines which serve to render it suitably solemn. It has however a neglected appearance, not being enclosed by a fence, except in particular spots that have palings around the graves of particular families. These palings are almost the only monuments. A very few graves have wooden ones carved and painted in resemblance of stone, with inscriptions; and one or two have stones. I suppose the scarcity of either of freestone or marble is the reason of their using wood; for no part of the State that I have yet seen gives the smallest indication of such substances. Indeed regular stones of any quality are extremely scarce here; so that even the foundations of houses and the walls of wells, that have any walls at all, are made of brick. ⁷⁰

Vacant spaces between surviving stone markers in Charleston churchyards are also mute testimony to the popularity of plain wooden grave markers. Although none survive in Charleston, in

Southern coastal and backcountry graveyards, a few plain grave boards, now devoid of both inscription and paint have been found. During the MESDA field research program, grave boards were observed in rural graveyards from northern Virginia (fig. 19) to Beaufort, South Carolina (fig. 20). In Shenandoah County, Virginia, the estate of Christian Stover, Jr., in 1813, contained a voucher for cash "paid William Wright for making 2 tomb boards for the grave of said decd. pr. rect. . . .[\$]5.25."''⁷¹ It

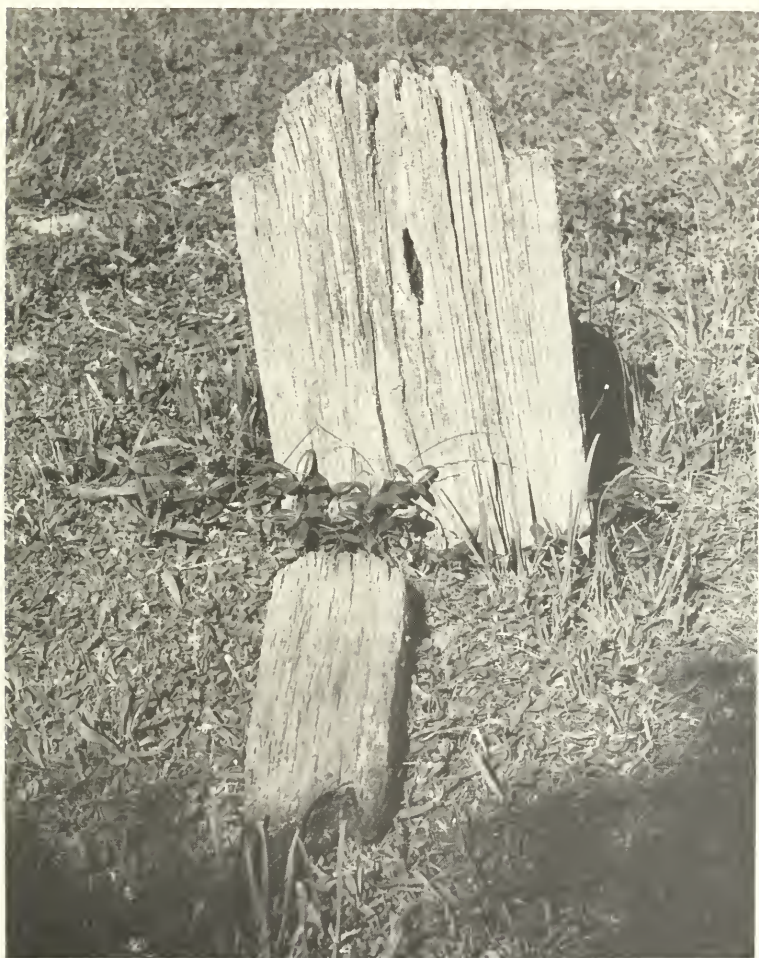


Figure 19. Grave boards, Old Providence Meeting House, Spotswood, Virginia, 1793. Walnut. Headboard: HOA 25'', WOA 16 1/2''. MRF S- 9496B.

is also possible that these less decorative single boards could have been interim markers placed at the burial site until marble or stone markers could be cut.



Figure 20. Grave board, St. Helena's Church, Beaufort, South Carolina, early nineteenth century. Cypress. Dimensions not recorded. MRF S-14,222.

A type of marker common in New England and related to the grave board, a hatchment, apparently was not part of Charleston burial traditions. Hatchments were defined by Samuel Johnson as “Armorial escutcheon[s] placed over a door at a funeral,” and often were referred to as escutcheons or scutcheons in New England documents. Samuel Sewell’s diary, a record of the daily details of a Massachusetts minister from 1674 to 1729, included the following: “Mourning Coach also and Horses in Mourning: Scutcheon on their sides and Deaths heads on their foreheads. . . . Scutchesons on the Pall. . . . Scutchesons on the Coffin.” Apparently it was traditional to hang the hatchment outside the deceased’s house during the mourning period, usually six months to a year, and then move it to the church.⁷² In Charleston no such evidence has been found. In fact, the existence of any southern-made hatchments is restricted to a sole surviving example (fig. 21) found at the Huguenot church of St. James, Goose Creek, South Carolina.⁷³ This hatchment, representing the



Figure 21. Hatchment, Iazard family coat of arms, St. James Goose Creek Church, South Carolina, 1743. Cypress. HOA 48 3/16"; W"OA 47 1/2"; DOA (outside frame) 5". MRF S-9859.

coat of arms of Ralph Izard, is painted on cypress boards and bordered with a frame five inches deep. Unfortunately, records for the church do not exist, so it is not known when the hatchment was hung in the church. Izard died in 1743, and therefore it is likely that the hatchment was made then.

A search of Charleston painters' and artists' advertisements for the mention of hatchments also proved fruitless, although Bishop Roberts, in 1735, did declare "that Portrait-painting and engraving, Heraldry and House painting are undertaken and performed expeditiously in a good manner." "Heraldry" could have signified hatchments and painted coats of arms. A similar reference was made by Jeremiah Theus in a September 1740 notice that: "Gentlemen and Ladies may have their Pictures drawn, likewise Landskips of all sizes, Crests and Coats of Arms for Coaches or Chaises."⁷⁴ It is apparent that Roberts and Theus had the skills to paint hatchments if asked. Another, perhaps stronger possibility for a Charleston hatchment painter was Daniel Badger I, who moved to Charleston in 1735 from Boston, where there was much evidence of hatchment artistry.

If hatchments were part of some Charleston funerals, it is not likely that they were documented. Most hatchments were painted after a death and therefore would not have been included in estate inventories unless they were kept in a dwelling. It is possible that ambiguous phrases in some appraisals, such as "family arms" or "family piece," might have been alluding to hatchments; however, these terms were just as likely describing other types of heraldry. For example, the 1739 inventory of Hannah Gale's estate listed "painted Smith's arms."⁷⁵ Mrs. Gale was the widow of Charleston blacksmith Daniel Gale, and the listing probably meant a coat of arms representing the blacksmith's trade. A reference to a coat of arms also should not be misconstrued. In New England the term generally signified a needlework family crest.⁷⁶ A Charleston record evincing the existence of such a piece of needlework was found in a 1765 letter from Peter Manigault in Charleston, to Major Edward Bromley in Pensacola, Florida, informing him of the death of a Tom Bromley: "He desired I would Keep for you the Family Coat of Arms, which I now have by me & would send you by this Conveyance, But that I hope for the Satisfaction of seeing you in Carolina, when I shall have the pleasure of delivering it with my own hands."⁷⁷

As suggested earlier, it is most likely that Charlestonians, as a rule, did not adhere to any hatchment tradition. All the evidence

found in England and New England indicates that hatchments mainly were used from the seventeenth to the mid- eighteenth centuries. Since the Low Country was settled later than New England, hatchments probably never really came into vogue there.

It is unfortunate that only documents concerning the construction of coffins in Charleston and their accompanying dressings and traditions can be cited and not physical examples from either crypt or archaeological investigation. The examination of actual Charleston coffins is vital to the understanding of Low Country burial customs. A British example of such investigation was the 1972 opening of a vault at the condemned Normanton Hall church site near Leeds, Yorkshire, which revealed sixteen Georgian period coffins, one of which, according to earlier research, had been made by Thomas Chippendale. Seventeenth century coffin design also is being investigated by some archaeologists from remains in Virginia as well as tombs and vaults in England.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the eighteenth century burial process, particularly in the Low Country, has been woefully neglected; there have been no excavations of any Charleston eighteenth century graves. Late nineteenth and twentieth century graves, however, are occasionally moved, offering researchers the opportunity of examining the evidence of that period.⁷⁹

It can be seen from this study that the Charleston woodworkers' roles in the undertaking process were varied. Unfortunately, scanty documentation and the lack of actual coffins for examination leave much of their involvement to conjecture and hypothesis. As other research has shown, the average Charleston cabinetmaker could not earn a living only making furniture, and undertaking appears to have been his most natural recourse for supplementing his income. However, only careful and supervised archaeological investigation of actual grave sites and tombs can shed light on the exact products and services he offered.

FOOTNOTES

1. Abraham LeSueur (d. 1740) was originally from Normandy. Although there are records of him in Charleston as early as 1696, Mrs. Sindrey's accounts are the first documents that mention his trade; he was active until about 1719. Agnes Leland Baldwin, *First Settlers of South Carolina, 1670-1700* (Easley, S.C., 1986), 141.
2. Elizabeth Sindrey Estate Account Book, 1705-20, 1, 3, 21. Collection of the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C.
3. Wills, No. 9, 1760-64 [transcript], Charleston County, S.C., 278; all primary sources cited hereafter, unless otherwise noted, are Charleston County.
4. Record of Wills, 1800-1807, 61; Mabel L. Webber, comp., "Dr. John Rutledge and His Descendants," *South Carolina Historical & Genealogical Magazine* (hereafter cited as *SCHGM*) 31 (1930): 18.
5. Wills, etc., 61B, 1726-27 [transcript], 439; Charleston *South Carolina Gazette*, 11 and 14 Aug. 1736; Miscellaneous Records, 1743-46, 23.
6. *S. C. Gazette*, 4 Sept. 1736.
7. Inventories, 94A-B, 1771-74, 296.
8. Robert Latham, ed., *The Illustrated Pepys* (Berkeley, Cal., 1978), 33-4.
9. Yvonne Brunhammer and Monique DeJayet, *Meubles et Ensemble Epoque Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Paris, 1966), 16, 68.
10. Wills, etc., 77A-B, 1748-51, 270-2.
11. Wills, etc., 85B, 1758-61 [transcript], 524; Inventories, D, 1800-18, 476-7; E, 1810-18, 270.
12. Charleston *South Carolina Gazette and Timothy and Mason's Daily Advertiser*, 7 Oct. 1795; Charleston *Strength of the People*, 17 Aug. 1809.
13. Thomas Elfe Account Book, account 64, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, S.C.
14. Charleston *State Gazette of South Carolina*, 5 July 1792; Charleston *City Gazette and Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1793.
15. Cash Received and Paid Away by the Treasurer of the Independent Congregational Church, 31 Mar. 1800, Records of the Independent Congregational Church, Charleston.
16. St. Michael's Account Book, 1798-1833, No. 17, 63, South Carolina Historical Society; St. Michael's Calendar, 1751-1900, Treasurer's Vouchers, 7 Aug. 1817.
17. Poor House Journal, 1, 1801-10, 20 Dec. 1802, City of Charleston Archives; Charleston *Courier*, 6 Nov. 1819.
18. Philip M. Hammer and George C. Rogers, Jr., eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* 2 (Columbia, S.C., 1977), 3-4.
19. James Poyas Day Book (rough copy), 1 Mar. 1764-June 1765, 99, 100, 102, July 1765-Dec. 1766, 368, South Carolina Historical Society; James Poyas Day Book (finished copy), 1 Feb. 1760-29 Dec. 1762, 128, 496, 1 January 1763-30 April 1765, 443, 496, Charleston Museum.

20. Poyas Day Book (rough copy), 1 Mar. 1764-June 1765, 194; There are other instances of funeral equipage, similar to the Snipes account, being sold through the Poyas store which should be read for fabric, adornment, and entertainment comparison. These can be found in both copies of the day books in the Charleston Museum and South Carolina Historical Society.
21. Robert M. Weir, ed., *The Letters of Freeman, Etc.* (Columbia, S.C., 1977); Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina* (Millwood, N.Y.: 1983), 301-5; *S.C. Gazette*, 29 June and 3 Aug. 1769.
22. *S.C. Gazette*, 21 Nov. 1774.
23. *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 28 Oct. 1806; *Courier*, 22 Dec. 1806.
24. Mrs. Miles's obituary mentioned four surviving children; *City Gazette*, 17 July 1804. Thompson travelled in and out of Charleston and other cities along the eastern seaboard. On 12 December 1804 he advertised in the *Times* of Charleston that he had "commenced PORTRAIT PAINTING, at Mrs. Cochran's long room King-street, No. 243."
25. "Four Letters of the Early Nineteenth Century," *SCHGM* 43: 54.
26. Inventories, D, 1800-10, 479-480.
27. *S.C. Gazette*, 30 Dec. 1760.
28. *The Cabinet-makers Philadelphia and London Book of Prices* (Philadelphia, 1796), 131. Collections of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries, Winterthur, Delaware.
29. David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina* 2 (Charleston, 1809), 337.
30. Clare Jervey, *Inscriptions on the Tablets and Gravestones in St. Michael's Church and Churchyard, Charleston, S.C.* (Columbia, S.C., 1906), preface.
31. Wills, No. 5, 1740-47 [transcript], 79; No. 8, 1757-63 [transcript], 486; No. 9, 1760-64 [transcript], 278.
32. Court of Common Pleas Judgment Book DD, Feb. 1767-Aug. 1768, 16.
33. Elfe Account Book, accounts 112, 169.
34. Inventories, D, 1800-10, 97, 476-7; H, 1834-44, 153.
35. Judgment Rolls, 1799, #1075A.
36. Mabel L. Webber, comp. "Dr. John Rutledge and His Descendants," *SCHGM* 31: 18; Bacot-Huger Collection, 11/49/15, 14 May 1821, South Carolina Historical Society; Inventories, H, 1834-44, 153.
37. Elfe Account Book, accounts 78, 126, 202.
38. R. Nicholas Olsberg, ed., *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, 23 April 1750-31 August 1751* (Columbia, S.C., 1974), 39, 51, 80.
39. Judgment Rolls, 1796, #4A; Inventories, H, 1834-44, 153.
40. *S.C. Gazette*, 9 Nov. 1734.
41. *Ibid.*, 22 Mar. 1739/40.
42. Donald Fennimore, Curator, Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum, letter to author, 17 May 1990.
43. Wills, etc., 73, 1741-43, 316; Inventories, 82A-B, 1753-56, 441-9; 87A-B, 1761-1763, 482-520.
44. Inventories, Y, 1769-71, 10; 94A-B, 1771-74, 1-18.

45. Charles Watts Account Books, 1802-1815, Book 4, 266, MESDA.
46. Inventories, D, 1800-10, 476-7.
47. Receipt Book of Isaac Motte & Company, 1768-1773, South Carolina Historical Society; Wills, etc., 71, 1739-43 [transcript], 173; Bacot-Huger Collection, 14 May 1821.
48. Court of Common Pleas Records, Feb. 1767-Aug. 1767, 228; Elfe Account Book, accounts 64, 76.
49. Inventories, D, 1800-10, 476-7; Wills, etc., 82A-B, 1753-56, 669, 689.
50. Wills, etc., 84, 1756-58, 320-4.
51. Inventories, 87A-B, 1761-1763, 482-520.
52. Elfe Account Book, account 93.
53. Wills, etc., 85B, 1758-61 [transcript], 524; 98, 99A-B, 1771-78, 243-51; Inventories, A, 1783-87, 288-9.
54. Elfe Account Book, account 184.
55. *Courier*, 19 Oct. and 5 Nov. 1818; Inventories, H, 1834-44, 153.
56. Inventories, D, 1800-10, 476-7.
57. Alexander Crawford Day Book, 4, 22, 28, 45, 50, 104.
58. *Charleston City Gazette or the Daily Advertiser*, 5 Oct. 1789.
59. Collection of the University Archives, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.
60. For more information on Botetourt's funeral, his burial, and the history of his coffin plate see the Williamsburg *Virginia Gazette*, 18 October 1770, supplement; *Catalogue of the College of William and Mary . . . Sessions 1860-61 and 1865-66* (Richmond, 1866), 18-19; Charles Washington Coleman, "Norborne, Baron de Botetourt, Governor-General of Virginia, 1768-1770, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 5, no. 3 (Jan. 1897), 165-71.
61. *Courier*, 28 Apr. 1807.
62. Diana Williams Combs, *Early Gravestone Art in Georgia and South Carolina* (Athens, Ga., 1986); Norman Vardney Mackie III "Gravestone Procurement in St. Mary's County (Maryland), 1634-1820" *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 83, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 229-40; Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, 1893 (reprint, New York, 1980), 82.
63. Benno M. Forman, "A New Light on Early Grave Markers," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 104 (1968): 127-9; Peter Benes, "Additional Light on Wooden Grave Markers" *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 111 (1975): 53-64; Frederick Burgess, *English Churchyard Memorials*, (London, 1963), 117.
64. Benes, "Additional Light," 55; Forman, "A New Light," 127.
65. *Charleston South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 18 Sept. 1770; Jervey, *Inscriptions*, 165.
66. Hill's sketchbook is in the collection of the Abdel Ross Wentz Library in the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pa.
67. Inventories, C, 1793-1800, 230; Crawford Day Book, 50.

68. St. Philip's Episcopal Church Vestry Minutes, 1761-95, 4 Mar. 1773, South Carolina Historical Society; Mrs. C. G. Howe and Mrs. Charles F. Middleton, eds., *Minutes of St. Michael's Church of Charleston, S.C. from 1758-1797* (Charleston, n.d.), 107-8.
69. Alexander Edwards, *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston . . .* (Charleston, 1802), 242-3, 454-60.
70. "Diary of Edward Hooker, 1805-1808," in American Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1896): 856.
71. Will Book K, 1816-18, 366, Shenandoah County, Va.
72. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 8th ed. (London: 1799); M. Halsey Thomas, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (New York, 1973), 387, 499, 509; Peter Summers, ed., *Hatchments in Britain 2* (London, 1976); Howard M. Chapin, "Colonial Hatchments" *Antiques* 14, no. 4 (Oct. 1929): 302; Jonathan L. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting in Seventeenth-Century Boston: Its History, Methods, and Materials," in *New England Begins: The Seventeenth Century*, 3 (Boston, 1982), 477; Nora M. Davis, "Colonial Hatchments in America" in *Charleston Year Book, 1946* (Charleston, 1949), 184.
73. Supposedly, a Morris family hatchment had survived in the Low Country as late as the 1940s, but it has not been recorded, and it is not known if it is of southern origin. Anna Wells Rutledge, *Artists in the Life of Charleston* (Philadelphia: 1949), 121.
74. *S.C. Gazette*, 17 May 1735, 6 Sept. 1740.
75. Wills, etc., 77A-B, 1748-51, 33.
76. Jane C. Nylander, "Textiles, Cloathing, and Needlework," in *The Great River* (Hartford, Conn., 1985), 401-7.
77. Peter Manigault Letterbook, ms., 1763-73, 32-3, South Carolina Historical Society. Thomas Bromley, a Charleston attorney, died on 22 August 1765 at Manigault's Goose Creek country home of Manigault and was buried there. "Thomas Bromley's Tombstone," *SCHGM* 35: 40-1.
78. Christopher Gilbert, "Chippendale as Undertaker," in *Furniture History* 9 (Leeds, 1973), 114-18; Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale* (New York, 1978), 249-52; Ivor Noel Hume "Martin's Hundred — The Search Continues," *Colonial Williamsburg* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1985), 5-14, 23. Hume's article describes coffins with lead linings; this type of lining has not been found in Charleston. The coffins discovered by Christopher Gilbert at Normanton Church in 1972 were lead and wood lined, and their outer cases were of elm and black velvet. English documents indicate that this was a common practice. For example, Lady Rebecca Gooch of Hampton, Middlesex, requested in her will of 12 August 1773 that: "unless I die at so great a distance they are obliged to put me in lead [instead of a wooden coffin]." "Will of Lady Rebecca Gooch, Widow of Sir William Gooch," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 23 (1915): 173.
79. Stanley South, "The General, the Major, and the Angel," in *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina*, No. 82 (Columbia, S.C., 1977), 31-49; Michael Trinkley and Debi Hacker-Norton, *Analysis of Coffin Hardware From 38CH778, Charleston County, South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1984).

MESDA seeks manuscripts which treat virtually any facet of southern decorative art for publication in the JOURNAL. The MESDA staff would also like to examine any privately-held primary research material (documents and manuscripts) from the South, and southern newspapers published in 1820 and earlier.

Some back issues of the *Journal*
are available.

The preparation of the *Journal* was made possible (in part) by a grant from the Research Tools and Reference Works Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent Federal Agency.

Photographs in this issue by the staff of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts except where noted.

MUSEUM OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS

FORSYTH ALEXANDER, *Editor/Acting Director of Publications*

NANCY BEAN, *Office Manager*

RUTH BROOKS, *Associate in Education*

SALLY GANT, *Director of Education and Special Events*

PAULA HOOPER, *Coordinator of Membership Services*

FRANK L. HORTON, *Director Emeritus*

MADelyn MOELLER, *Director*

BRADFORD RAUSCHENBERG, *Director of Research*

MARTHA ROWE, *Research Associate*

WESLEY STEWART, *Photographer*

